Back Again

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Back Again

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Summary

What is Light to do when he wakes up after his life as a Shinigami is over, only to find himself with both his memories and his life back to the way it was before...with the Death Note in his school bag?

The Second Death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chronos meandered through the dead realm he'd been calling his home for a little while. There wasn't much to do here so often he chose to explore, even though nothing ever changed. He was still known as the "new one" to the other Shinigamis. He'd been assured early on that because their kind lived virtually forever, it would be quite a long time before he lost that moniker.

Chronos didn't remember anything before awakening in the dead realm. Evidently, none of them did.

Chronos was the only one who seemed to care. None of the other Shinigami cared about what they had been before or if they had been at all. In truth, they seemed not to care about much of anything, even if it was finding meaning in existence. Chronos was still a large point of curiosity for most of them it wasn't every millennium that a new Shinigami was born - but the average Shinigami's life was still perpetual boredom. It was only accentuated by the conversations they had amongst themselves and...gambling. Just gambling.

At least, Chronos thought to himself, *Shinigami make excellent company.* And they did. Chronos found his fellow death gods to be both affable and friendly. Except for some good-natured teasing, they'd been exceedingly helpful to Chronos when he'd first appeared and there seemed to be a quiet understanding amongst all of them.

Perhaps it was because he was so much younger, but even as he shared in his fellow's boredom, Chronos seemed to find more meaning in his existence than the others did. It wasn't easy, living in their dead realm, but where there was a will, there was a way!

He explored every inch of their realm in the way only a new being could. He talked with the others, discussing all manner of things he could think of, which became the thing that alerted the other Shinigamis - and him - to the fact that he had exceptionally high intelligence, even among his own kind. Only Nu was able to keep him on his toes during a discussion.

And then there was the majority of his time which he began to spend in front of the portal to the human realm. People-watching became his new favorite hobby. That was how he met Ryuk, the Shinigami that he quickly learned was even more of an oddball amongst their kind than he was.

Early on in his attempts to hold back the tedium of Shinigami life, Chronos had heard stories about this Shinigami, Ryuk, who left for the human realm once not long ago with his and another Shinigami's Death Note to assuage his own boredom. He'd come back to their realm, his fun over, shortly before Chronos had been born, but evidently, he *did* have quite a bit of fun while he was gone.

Their realm, although dying, was quite large and the combination of Chronos often doing things and Ryuk seemingly keeping to himself more often than not, led to Chronos only meeting this infamous Shinigami for the first time as they both stood over the portal. Watching the humans.

One human, in particular, Chronos felt drawn to and he watched them religiously, seldom going a day without seeing them.

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Chronos decided to crawl back to the portal where he often viewed the same young man. A boy, really, in human terms. He was so terribly young among his kind and yet he shouldered massive

responsibilities like they were nothing and with not a word of complaint.

Maybe he even enjoyed it, Chronos couldn't be sure.

Regardless, Chronos felt for him. He felt for him in a way he didn't for any other human. He felt an odd... *responsibility* ...towards him. Poor boy.

Guilt? Is that what Chronos really felt? Guilt for what, he wondered?

Ryuk perched on a rocky outcropping somewhere behind Chronos, as he so often did. Whether he did this because of how interesting he found humans or because he was just following him, Chronos also didn't know. After they'd talked a bit over the human realm, he and Ryuk had simply clicked and begun spending most of their time together.

“Looking at that human again?” Ryuk called amusement hovering clearly within his voice, as always.

“Of course,” Chronos responded casually, not taking his eyes off of the frail-looking boy laying spread out on the floor of his abode. Was it a home? It looked more like a human office than a home, but he did sleep there…

“Why do I care about this child so much?” Chronos whispered to himself.

“Beats me.” Ryuk evidently heard him. For some strange reason though, Ryuk kinda sounded to him like he did know. Like he was

privy to some substantial information that Chronos didn't know. He didn't ask. "Why you care for any human is beyond me." Ryuk continued, uncaringly.

Chronos watched as the white-haired human calmly twirled his long hair with one finger, as he was in the habit of doing. The hair had been somewhat short - perhaps a *bit* long for his gender - when Chronos he'd first taken to watching him, but since then, the human had allowed it to grow unimpeded until it ran down to his lower back.

How peculiar. How different. Maybe that was why Chronos watched him so much? But then why the vague feeling of guilt in his gut as he watched the small human live his life? Regardless, Chronos had learned a great deal about human culture from watching him and other humans. From his observations, the Shinigami learned that the young man was a detective and apparently was one of great renown. Strangely, the boy didn't show much emotion ever, despite his great success in life, which was something that made Chronos sad for him. He didn't seem to enjoy existence and just went about the motions, unlike Chronos who mostly succeeded in finding happiness. It was tragically ironic, he thought, given the respective worlds they inhabited.

"Hyuk!" Ryuk gave that distinctive laugh of his. "Hey, L□Chronos, why don't we go for a fly? I can tell ya' more stories while we do!" The other Shinigami tried to bribe him, but despite how much Chronos enjoyed the act of flying, he remained unmoved.

"Not now, Ryuk. I'm watching Nate." Chronos murmured.

"That's not the name he goes by, is it?" Ryuk asked, as if he didn't already know, and slid down from the tall rock to stand beside him.

“No, he goes by the strange nickname *‘Near’* , but Nate River is his name, no matter what he may desire it to be.” Chronos returned, readily. Although he had been trying to ignore it this whole time, his red pupils dragged themselves up to the negative space above the young human’s head. Ryuk saw this.

“He doesn’t have much time left, does he?” Ryuk commented.

There was a short, weighty silence. “No, he doesn’t,” Chronos said, at last. 10668 was floating in red above the boy’s head; three human days left in his lifespan. Just three human days. “It doesn’t seem fair.” Chronos found himself whispering, almost unconsciously.

Ryuk looked at him with curiosity and no small amount of surprise as Chronos continued. “He’s so young among humans and he does so much for his world. Yet, he’s barely begun to live his life, at all. He needs more time…” Chronos drew off. His thinking was reaching truly uncomfortable territory now.

There was nothing he could do, after all. It was forbidden to use their Death Notes to extend a human’s life - Chronos didn’t even know how Nate was going to die - and Ryuk had even told him the secret about how to kill a Shinigami! He couldn’t…

He could do nothing to help.

“Hey!” Ryuk started suddenly, causing Chronos to jump a little as he was wrenched quickly from his depressing thoughts. “This is getting sad, how ‘bout we write some names down? I bet it’ll get your spirits up!”

Chronos looked at the other Shinigami - his friend - before slowly turning to stare at Nate for a few long moments. Then he sighed

lightly and turned back to his friend to give Ryuk a tired smile. “Sure, Ryuk, sounds fun.”

Chronos reached out languidly with a long, slender finger and touched the surface of the portal. Like a mirror covered in water, it rippled and its appearance changed, reacting to the young Shinigami’s will. In Nate’s place, appeared several mafia members, having some kind of meeting in their lair.

Ryuk chuckled. “You know, at first I didn’t see why you particularly cared about what humans you killed; whether they were innocent or not. Why bother killing criminals as if that was going to solve the world’s problems? I still don’t get it completely, but I will admit there is definitely more fun to killing criminals.”

Chronos couldn’t remember having that conversation. Oh well, it wasn’t like he could expect Ryuk to always tell him what he was thinking at the moment. “It won’t solve the human world’s problems, Ryuk, but it may make it a better place.”

“Humans scurry around like little ants, lying and stealing and that won’t change. You’re young, but you’ve been watching humans enough to know that. Humans have all sorts of laws, rules, and professions meant to control the chaos they create, for all the good that’s done them. You’re always the optimist, aren’t you?” Ryuk said.

Chronos scoffed lightly. “We don’t know it won’t help. We can’t see the future, after all, Ryuk. Besides, when killing career criminals, it is nearly impossible not to do at least some little good. Maybe a little is enough.” His voice sounded wistful at the end a small, barely there, a smile tugged at his lips.

Ryuk didn’t seem to quite agree, but he gave a smile of his own to accompany it, anyway. “Well, at any rate, it provides some good

entertainment. Although it would be more interesting if you had them all die of heart attacks instead of writing their deaths as accidents." Ryuk said, peering curiously into the portal as Chronos began writing down the names of all the men in the lair.

"Why is that?" Chronos asked, mildly. For some reason, when Chronos had been told that he'd need to kill humans to lengthen his own life and gotten started on that, he'd been reticent to have even one of them expire due to heart attack, so he'd ended up making them all look like accidents. Of course, he was careful never to kill one as they were in the act of killing someone else, lest he accidentally extend a human's life and off himself by accident.

Ryuk chuckled. "I bet they'd panic if a bunch of criminals started dying of heart attacks." There was that sound of knowing in his voice again.

Chronos sighed but didn't ask again. Sometimes Ryuk liked to keep things to himself for entertainment purposes, Chronos could let his friend have that. Chronos snapped his book shut and hooked it onto his belt, on the same side as Ryuk kept his, and turned back to the portal to watch the results of his work.

The mafia men continued to lounge around, unaware of their fate, and then without warning, an explosion ripped through the building and destroyed everything in its wake. The men's bodies were thrown from the force of the explosion, but they were already dead before they could have reacted. There were no survivors.

"And that's that." Ryuk smiled, watching as his friend's lifespan shot up. He could probably have gotten more years out of them if they hadn't been criminals but taking out the whole group had certainly done him a favor. His friend had only been dead a very short time, even by human standards, and he was already doing better as a Shinigami than anyone else, but maybe that was to be expected.

“That’s that.” Chronos agreed. He looked dazedly at the portal for a second and seemed to be fighting against the urge to turn the visual back to the human boy he was so interested in, before deciding against it and taking flight.

Ryuk smirked and jumped into the air after him.

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“Today’s the day,” Ryuk announced unhelpfully, although his tone was far more somber than usual. He felt something for his friend over this, he really did. He may not feel the human was at all important, but Chronos did. Still, there was nothing they could do about it. Chronos knew what would happen if he attempted to help the human.

The reason that extending a human’s life causes a Shinigami to die is because it’s an aversion to nature. Death and even murder is a natural thing, unfettered by conventional human morality, and albeit a little aimless in their execution, a Shinigami’s duty is to feed into that nature by adding more to the funeral pyre. So a Shinigami dies when they try to go directly against their role of an agent of the world’s chaos, only able to avoid this fate if they’re given an okay by their king first. The King had once told Ryuk this, himself.

It’s a deterrent to the others that might try this foolishness, not that Ryuk ever understood why any Shinigami would want to help a human, but it had been done before.

Humans in their foolishness have come over the centuries to insist that all death and murder is wrong, but they also seek to needlessly bring order to the chaotic world and nature itself. To do what can never be

done. Thankfully, their attempts to tame the untamable have never been successful, because the catastrophe of the natural order righting itself would be a massive bloodbath.

How will he die? Chronos couldn't help but ask himself repeatedly as he watched the numbers above Nate's head whittle down to almost nothing. *Soon. Far too soon.*

As the time in the boy's life got down to a minute left, Chronos saw movement in the corner of the room. As always, Nate was in his office space/home and as was usually the case as well, he had a handful of his employees standing around at his disposal. One was new, though, and that was the individual who moved.

Chronos wouldn't have at all viewed it as important if it wasn't for the fact that Nate now had fifty seconds left in his life. Almost faster than the eye could see, the "employee" whipped out a gun and yelled something that seemed nonsensical to Chronos, "For Kira!!" and took the shot. Chronos's heart skipped several beats - huh, he didn't know it could do that - but another attendant lunged forward and took the bullet for the widely-staring boy. They fell to the ground, dead, and Chronos…

...Chronos, for a flash, saw the image in his mind's eye of the white-haired boy laying sprawled out on the ground like his worker, eyes staring up open yet unseeing. Chronos felt terror and revulsion as if he might throw up and cry all at once, which was strange because he didn't believe he'd ever done either of those things.

The movements of his own body caught him by surprise as Chronos pulled his Death Note from his side. His motions were fast and fluid as the Note was flipped open to a random page and his pen was placed to it. Beside him, Chronos saw Ryuk flinch sharply out of the corner of his eye, but he didn't let it distract him from his mission.

“Chronos?? What do you think you’re doing?!” Ryuk gasped, his clawed arm jutting out to grab Chronos’ Note away from him, which the younger Shinigami dodged.

“Breaking a natural law,” Chronos responded calmly, eyeing the name hovering over the murderous human’s head. Said human looked angrily down at the dead man who had unexpectedly taken the bullet before looking back at his target and lining up for another shot at Nate. The boy’s wide eyes stared straight down the barrel in what appeared to be shock.

“Chronos, no!” Ryuk sounded unexpectedly desperate and Chronos would likely have been staring at his friend in shock if he wasn’t a Shinigami on a mission at the moment.

If he just wrote down the human’s name, there would be nearly a minute of wait time for their death to take effect and Nate didn’t have that. There wasn’t time! As soon as Chronos finished the name, he wrote down the means and time of death, five seconds from then.

“No!” Ryuk lunged at Chronos again, this time with his whole body, but it was just too late. Chronos had already finished as he was knocked to the ground with the older Shinigami on top of him and his Note was ripped from his claws.

On the portal, the assassin was stopped halfway through pulling the trigger by a heart attack. Chronos let out a sigh of relief. Nate stared at the slumped body of the assassin in utter shock. Ryuk stared at the slumped body of his friend in utter shock.

“Why…?” Ryuk whispered, his claws shaking from where his one hand pinned an unmoving Chonos to the ground. “ *Why?* I knew he meant a lot to you, but□”

That was a lie, even Chronos didn't understand what he was feeling. All he knew was that he had to save this particular boy's life now. He *had* to make it up to him. And he did. The thought brought a small smile to the young Shinigami's face as he let out a petal-soft sigh. His body tingled, almost numb, and a quick glance downwards with crimson eyes alerted Chronos to the expected sight of his body turning to some kind of sand. Soul sand? Whatever.

Chronos chose to spend his last few remaining moments as his world began to turn black around the edges looking between the shocked human in the portal and the shocked Ryuk still hovering above him. Similar red eyes gazed into his own with such surprising despair that Chronos could think nothing but, *I'm sorry, Ryuk.* He wished he could say it, but his mouth no longer worked.

He could move no part of his body and his consciousness was starting to fade. His vision was just about completely dark now and he could barely think. Where was he again?

"Chronos! Light! Light-o!" Chronos heard Ryuk's voice call out mournfully and in his last seconds of awareness, Chronos was confused.

Who was Light?

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Light opened his eyes.

And he *remembered.*

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Light sacrificing himself for Near was basically his way of saying "my bad" for trying to kill him in the past.

Third Life

Chapter Summary

Light makes sense of his situation and comes to a decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Light stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom with the widest eyes.

I…I can't believe it. He thought to himself, refusing to move.

Everything felt surreal to him, like he was part of his body and also not. Like he was part of this *world* and also not. It felt like he'd laid on this bed only a second ago and yet at the same time, it was a lifetime ago. Everything felt disjointed.

He'd been a Shinigami. He'd *died.* For Near–for Nate. And now he–

–wasn't dead?

Life is too weird, Light concluded as he raised his right hand to hover over his face and proceeded to open and close it a few times. He *was* alive, right? It seemed ironic that he'd experienced the feeling of dying *twice* but had yet to experience what actually being dead felt like, he was always being reborn into someone else.

Light's whole body jerked slightly as that thought reminded him of who he was just seconds ago, or so it felt like. *Chronos* . Not a bad name for one he hadn't given himself, though he still liked Kira better…

Was he still Chronos?

Light reached a hand behind him and leaned away from the bed a little to feel around his back. His wings were gone, so that was a point in favor of the idea that he wasn't a Shinigami anymore. At any rate, his exact situation was a little more important to figure out than his species at the moment. Light slowly closed his eyes and tried to sort out his memories.

That was easier said than done, too. His mind was a jumble of two lifetimes, but it had the effect of feeling like three because a few of the memories from his first life felt like they had just happened while it was only some of the later ones that felt like a lifetime ago. The Shinigami memories were somewhere in the middle, feeling both new and old but not in a confusing way.

Light let out a frustrated sigh as he scrunched his nose as he let himself feel a little bit of annoyance at it all for just a moment. It was obvious to...Chronos?...that his whole life had been screwy for a long time. In fact!

If he was to believe his instincts, he might have gone back in time.

He would have to get up and check his computer, maybe go downstairs, to be sure, but he thought he was probably right and he was nowhere near being able to emotionally process that at the moment. He was still feeling numb from dying again and having all these memories shoved back in his head!! Light huffed, tiredly. His memories at least indicated that he was in his last year of high school and they weren't the only thing.

It wasn't enough to think that he was just in his old bedroom, he'd

moved in with Misa years before his death and he remembered living for a handful of years more as a Shinigami before dying so it had been nearly ten years since he'd been in this room! Even if for some absurd reason his room had been kept the exact same as how he'd left it when he moved out, there were still some things missing, things he'd bought sometime after becoming Kira and left there when he moved out. They weren't here.

And then there were the memories!

His Shinigami memories were pretty normal, but again there was a strange doubling effect in some of his human memories. He can remember his whole first life as Light and then becoming Kira like it was a straight line, but his earlier memories of that life - like the ones from his last year of high school - feel like they happened more recently than the last of his experiences before he died (as a human, mind).

That *only* makes any kind of sense if dying as a Shinigami had brought him back in time or, Light supposed, to another dimension identical to his own in every way. It was irrelevant whichever one it was, the effect was the same so it didn't matter. Time travel would at least explain why some of his comparatively older memories felt the freshest like they had just happened while things he knew he had done later on in his life felt like they'd happened two (admittedly short) lifetimes ago...

Light's old self from long past would have scoffed at the idea out of hand, but he'd decided around the time he met Ryuk the first time around to just assume everything is possible. He'd mostly just tossed his skepticism out of his bedroom window and never looked back.

Screw logic and critical thinking! It wasn't going to help with the surreal dumpster fire that his life became after the Death Note!

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Huh. *Death Note.*

Now that he thought about it, his memories of his boring schoolday and picking up the Death Note outside his school were the clearest in his mind. With that realization, Light took no time in forcing his numb body off his bed and over to where his backpack laid on the floor.

His heart began to beat wildly as he flipped it open and rooted around inside it. He'd barely started when his hand hit something that felt familiar and he slowly drew it out of his bag. The black binding and cover with a white script steadily emerged before his eyes.

There it is , Light thought to himself as he looked down at the notebook in his hands. *The Death Note.* His hands were shaking as he maneuvered the Note open to the first page...and there was nothing there. He flipped through more pages. It was empty.

He hadn't written in it yet.

Light...Light remembered this day. He'd had his day at school, lamented how rotten the world was, found the Note, and brought it

home after feeling the strong urge to check it out. His fresher memories stopped there and his older ones picked up, reminding him of how he'd gone about testing out the Note that night and immediately lost his shit. He *definitely* remembered writing out at least two full pages of names by the time he met Ryuk about five days later.

He'd pretty much gotten the proof of where (or when) he was, but he didn't remember the date, so he went ahead with turning on his computer, anyway. November 28th. He checks the year just to be sure and yep, that checks out. He stared at the date as he thought. That makes it almost three months before he meets L.

Light sucked in a breath as some of the weight of what it meant to be back in time hit him. If he hadn't lived as a Shinigami for a while, he would probably have gone mental right then and there. As it stood, took a shaky breath and closed his eyes for a moment, forcing himself to continue thinking analytically about the situation, even as the thought of that person made his mind want to come to a crashing halt.

Light leaned back in his chair as his breath left him in an instant. Those eyes as deep as the ocean were still seared into his memory, even after all this time! He felt ashamed that he had ever forgotten the detective for a second, even if it hadn't been his fault.

As a Shinigami, he had been watching over Near, but if L had still been alive at the time, Light was sure he would have been watching over him more. That man. That infuriating, wonderful man that had spent almost a year making his mark on Light's life that would never go away. And how could it? Light had never loved anyone before L and never did again. Oh yes, he'd had no idea his feelings for the detective at the time, but he did now.

He'd taken L for granted, in a way. The man was almost as messed up as Light had been in many ways, but Light had still loved him as much

as he was ever able to love anybody at the time, not that he'd ever realized it in that life even as his feelings grew stronger in the man's absence.

Thinking over things right before you die and then experiencing life as a Shinigami again before dying really gives one different perspectives. Enough to realize when you've been an idiot. And Light had certainly won the prize for that.

He'd been such a *jerk* and honestly, that was putting it nicely. He was an out-and-out psychopath after a while and that god complex looks even more ridiculous in retrospect after his time spent as an actual god. He started it all just as much because he was bored as it was any goals he'd had for bettering the world. Sure he had his vision and he still did, but it was far less noble than he'd let himself believe and it quickly devolved into a battle for survival and pride between him and L and then Nate. Poor young Nate, who he tried to *kill* .

What was it that he read in one of his college courses: the lies one tells oneself are perhaps the worst of all? How ironic. And true. Light had lied to himself and he had done so regularly. He'd wanted to make the world a better place, but he was motivated by so much self-interest underneath it all and he didn't want to face that at the time, to let go of his idea of himself as a good person.

So he excused every action he did instead of facing his own flaws and trying to better himself, resorting to demonizing everyone who crossed him even the slightest bit in his mad dash to absolve himself of any blame. Meanwhile, he had complete contempt for everyone he killed, criminals and innocents alike.

He'd treated his friends (he uses the term loosely) and family like utter garbage even while putting them through so much. And the person he regretted his treatment of the most?

Matsuda. Looking back on it with all his memories, Light realized Matsuda had been a good friend to him, the best friend, and a good coworker. He was always there to show his support in the case and come to Light - and even *Kira's* - defense. He was kind and thoughtful and from the moment Light had joined the investigation, Matsuda had stuck with him. And what was his reward? Betrayal and contempt!

Light groaned and rubbed his face roughly in agitation at just the mere thought of his last day alive.

Sure, Matsuda had shot him, but only after he'd been pushed too damn far. Really, the man was practically a saint for putting up with both Light and L for as long as he did. Even when Light finally came out as Kira, Matsuda had still tried to understand him first, ask him his reasons! If Light thought he might have taken L for granted, then he absolutely failed to appreciate Matsuda and all that he had to offer before he died!

Light sat up, staring at the date on his computer again.

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He wanted to make it up to Matsuda, be the friend he should have been before.

His eyes drifted to the Death Note. *I wonder,* Light thought. *Why I happened to come back to right after I got this. Why not before I ever picked it up? Could it be a coincidence? ...Maybe, strange things just happen without reason often enough, I suppose. Still, there's the question of what I'm expected to do now.*

Being a Shinigami had given Light perspective and not just on how not to be full of himself. He'd seen death as a just punishment back then, but it wasn't. Death might not be fun when you're faced with losing your life or the life of a loved one, but it wasn't some cosmic punishment for wrongdoing.

Death...was just a natural part of existence. People and creatures had to die, it was just a matter of where and when. And the Shinigami...existed to fill that role. Sure, people died all the time without a Shinigami's help, but death was renewal. You get the most renewal when there are creatures specifically created to make that happen.

Most Shinigami were bored with existence, they didn't care about humans, and if Light had been like them then he probably wouldn't even bother doing anything with this chance he'd been given, but he was himself.

At the end of the day, Light did care. It was probably as Ryuk said, he was an eternal optimist. He wanted to believe that making any change, any small change, made a lasting difference. Even if there was no meaning to existence, that just meant he could create his own meaning. Even if humans would still fight and squabble and murder, cutting back on even a little bit of that could do something good for someone.

At the end of the day, wasn't that the best thing he could hope to do with his existence? Make at least one person's life a little better? It was the reason he'd killed criminals as a Shinigami when he was adding to his years. At the end of the day, he cared about humanity and still wanted to do what he could to help some of them out. He still wanted to try and make a change!

Light is a Shinigami at heart now, even if he still cares more than any

Shinigami should. He wasn't going to shy away from death or his second chance just to lead a normal life, he'd honestly never be normal now, anyway.

This wouldn't be like last time. *He* wouldn't be like last time. But acting as Kira had done so much good along with all of the bad and if he didn't pick up the mantle again, those good things would never happen. Light didn't know if he was doing right, didn't know if this was the answer, but it felt right to him. He was never going to do any different, Shinigami had one real purpose in existence. That was who he was!

Speaking of people needing help…

It was as Light came to his decision that he remembered exactly how he had tested out the Death Note the first time. He picked up his remote and turned on his little tv, finding it already on the local news. It was immediately obvious that nothing had happened yet, the news was relatively calm. They were just showing some stock footage and he looked away before the news anchor came on.

Yet if things really were as he suspected, soon the news would be interrupted by a madman holding a *preschool of all things* hostage. The children and adults might make it out okay if Light didn't use the Note unlike last time, but he still remembered how clearly dangerous the man who caused the incident had been and so there was every chance that one or more children would die.

Light smirked lightly, letting out a breathy laugh as he did so. Better start this killing party off with a bang, then!

Light left the channel on, raising the volume a little bit, and got up from his desk. He'd keep an ear out for the news report. He didn't remember the criminal's name so he'd have to wait for the report,

even if he wished he could remember that mundane bit of information just to save those poor kids and caretakers the unnecessary trauma.

Light's heart ached at the thought of what it must have been like to go through that. Having some man come into their preschool waving a gun and taking them hostage, not sure if they would survive, cops outside, then seeing the man drop dead!

Light's ears pricked up as he heard the news being interrupted and threw himself back at his desk, opening the Death Note and grabbing a pen. His eyes unwaveringly stared at the tv as a news report that felt like the textbook definition of deja vu played, waiting for the moment.

There it was!

The criminal's face was shown on the screen and there was his name underneath it. Light quickly jotted down the name and waited with bated breath, hoping that no one was shot in the time it took the criminal to die. People changed their fates and the fates of others all the time.

Hell, that's what he and the other Shinigami had always done each time they put their pens to paper, so just because it didn't happen last time didn't mean he wasn't worried this time. *Please don't let anyone get hurt.*

"Hold on, the hostages are coming out!" The news reporter yelled excitedly, holding a hand to his ear.

He needn't have worried, the children and caretakers rushed out of the building forty seconds later, all with scared but relieved looks on their faces and all perfectly unharmed. Some of them even looked

happy!

Light allowed himself a small smile. *That* was what he should have been doing this for the first time, the joy of people being given the chance to live another day and the personal satisfaction of being the one to do that for them.

He watched the small group crying tears of joy and being taken care of by the police for a few moments longer before the camera left them and went back to the reporter, who was saying that the police were heading into the building. Light turned the tv off then, he didn't need to see the rest of it.

This was it, then. He was really doing this and honestly? It felt great! He had so much changed from the person he once was, but at the end of the day he would still be himself and this was his way. It felt like everything he was made for.

"Ah!" Light breathed out sharply and brought a hand to one of his eyes. His eyes stung! It wasn't too bad, but it did still make him flinch a little in pain. Did he get something in them? Jeez!

Light rubbed his eyes lightly as he scooted his desk chair back and stood up. He should probably wash them out with some water and if that didn't work he'd have to try something else.

Light had to squint his eyes open as he made his way to his bathroom and slid through the door. He didn't waste a minute in hunching himself over the sink and turning on the tap, splashing a generous amount of water onto his face and eyes.

When he was done, Light reached over blindly for a towel and wiped his face with it as he spat out the water that'd gotten into his mouth.

He was pleased to note that his eyes were feeling better now and thought it'd only been a minor annoyance...until he looked up into the mirror and gasped.

His golden eyes went wide at what he saw. It wasn't that there was anything behind him, but instead something *above* him. His name floating in red letters above his head in just the way he could see people's names when he'd been a Shinigami.

Light was beyond words, *he was shocked,* and as he stared at himself - or rather, the name - in the mirror, he then saw that for just a moment, his golden-brown eyes flashed a crimson red.

Chapter End Notes

Annnnnnd let there be Shinigami eyes!

Next time, Light will start plotting his new turn as Kira and thinks about L more. Also, Ryuk!

The Human Shinigami

Chapter Summary

Light makes plans. And Ryuk!!

Chapter Notes

You can thank today for being my birthday because that's why you're getting a new chapter. Wish me a Happy Birthday, people!!

Light stared at his reflection and the words *Light Yagami* above his head.

What the hell is going on here? Light thought, watching his own eyes. They didn't flash red again. *I have...my eyes back. My eyes are back!*

The thought felt strange even to him because of his two sets of memories. His golden human eyes felt like his own, the ones he'd had since he was born and seen in the mirror every day, but his crimson Shinigami eyes felt familiar in the same way like they were the ones he'd always had.

Light leaned closer to the mirror and lightly touched the area under his right eye, peering closely at them. His reflection and the hovering name were right up against the mirror now. *Why can't I see my lifespan?* Light wondered to himself. *Can someone just never see their own lifespan?*

The mirror wasn't giving him any answers so after a few minutes, he peeled himself away from it and went back to his room. With the habit of a lifetime of stress, Light made a beeline for his led and laid back on it, laying his head on one of his arms like a pillow.

Here he was again, staring up at the ceiling and wondering how his

life had come to this. And what to do now. That, of course, was a concern, especially now that he apparently had his Shinigami eyes back for no reason.

He'd already established that he would always be Kira, in this life or any other, but there was no way he was going to go about it the same as before. He was horrified and disgusted by most of his actions from before and that was two lives ago, anyway. At his core, he was the same person, but like an adult looking back on their childish teenage years, he'd outgrown the person he used to be.

Light sighed and closed his eyes lightly, deciding to look at nothing as he thought.

He needed to decide what his more immediate actions were. He'd kept things the same so far, which he mostly just did because his morals found it unconscionable that he could let the people he knew would be in a hostage situation get hurt. However, it had the nice effect of keeping the timeline the way he remembered it so he had more time to think about what he actually *wanted* to change.

Light's hand clenched into a fist around his bedsheets for a second as he remembered something. *Speaking of people I saved the first time around, that woman-*

He'd forgotten about her the first time around, she hadn't mattered to him for long, but he remembered now that he saved a woman that night who was about to be raped outside of a convenience store. It was outside a business, but it was unlikely someone would come outside to help her if they noticed given how intimidating those guys were, any bystanders would call the police and unlike with the hostage situation, Light was under no illusions what would happen if even a minute or two passed without interference in that situation. The police wouldn't make it in time.

Light forced his fist to unclench, but he was still so angry at the thought. Rapists were the worst. Attacking people in such a way was far worse than the murder of innocent people, even if both actions were terrible. Light deeply mourned his willingness to kill anyone who crossed him, even if they posed no threat to anyone besides himself, though he personally still believed he'd done something right with the first two names he wrote down in his Note.

He barely remembered the incident with the woman, so he would definitely have to go to the scene again that night and wait around for it to happen, so he could get the rapist's name and face again. Light glanced at his alarm clock. He had time. He wanted to get there early, just in case, and he didn't remember the exact time it happened, but he remembered it was pitch dark at the time and it was only early evening now.

And after that? Light paused there. After he killed the rapist, what would he do from there? There was no one else off the top of his head that he needed to kill ASAP to avoid someone getting hurt, but he would need to have a stronger idea about how he was going to move forward this time as Kira.

His Shinigami experiences made it seem just the opposite, like just about anything he did as long as it wasn't with the same cruelty as before would be alright. After all, he did end up making his mark on the world the first time around regardless, and even for as young a death god as he was, he knew that human lives and their societies themselves were ridiculously transient. By that belief, trying to attribute meaning to life, actions, human suffering was a fool's errand.

Light didn't truly feel all of that to be true, not completely, but becoming a god of death no matter how short of a stint, has changed a good deal of his worldview. As a human, the world seems so big that you never realize just how narrow your own worldview is. You see so little and yet it feels like you see so much. And then you die.

And suddenly it's like the camera zooms out and the very things that took up so much of your sight before are now so small you can barely see them at all. Nothing becomes clearer, just...simpler.

As a human, Light was always ascribing meaning to all manner of things, from believing that things like fate were on his side, to even convincing himself at one point that he had been intentionally given the Death Note, despite distinctly remembering now that Ryuk had told him it was merely chance. Regardless of the skeptics out there (like L), humans as a species tended to do that a lot.

It was...easier to blame occurrences both good and bad on fate or gods or karma...and it was all air. It was easier for humans to do this because the only alternative was to face the realization that the world is an uncaring void, in a way at least. It is easier for humans to say that *people* are uncaring rather than the universe because the universe can't be corrected, but if it's a *human* that's the problem, then the uncomfortable feeling of inevitable nothingness at the end of each one of their journeys moves further away and they can breathe again.

It's hilarious in a way because humans care *so much,* more than any other known beings. They *want* things to have meaning, idealistically so, as if it will make their struggles any less grueling or their successes any more glorious. And Light…

...was absolutely no exception to this. Even when he was a Shinigami without his memories, a trace of his former humanity lingered so strongly in him that anyone could tell it was there. He only killed criminals when he wanted to add years onto his lifespan, he fascinated himself with the human's struggles becoming invested in their little stories, and he especially kept his protective watch over Nate.

Ironically, he might have shown more human kindness and caring as a Shinigami than he *ever* had in his first life as a human.

The fact of the matter was that Light *did* care. He knew that the universe had no meaning and that all of life's struggles and triumphs, each petty goal, and even existence itself had no higher purpose and any small significance one could find in any of those things would be worn away by the waves of time before the blink of a Shinigami's eyes.

And, his Shinigami side reminded him, it was practical. In his past life, even if he'd ended up killing thousands of innocent individuals falsely accused of crimes or guilty of only petty crimes (the full truth of the matter will never be known, even to him), his work as Kira had managed to stop all wars and serious crime worldwide had dropped by *over* 70%.

Even without taking into consideration how many people were saved by the lack of wars and war crimes - a not insubstantial number - there are hundreds of thousands of murders each year.

As Light picked through his computer, moving along with his thoughts, he started piecing together a picture of the world as it was at the moment, a view which had gotten disjointed when he was removed from it at his death. He was slightly reminded of why he had been so disillusioned with the world the first time around, enough to think it was rotten to the core if his memory served, even if now felt nowhere near that amount of emotional impact after all this time.

A study was done by the *Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development* there were apparently around 480,000 "intentional homicides" - whatever that encapsulated - in 2004, for example. Ah, the internet. Anyway, if that dropped by 70% during his time as Kira, then just with that one aspect of crime alone, he entirely *prevented* 336,000 murders never mind just getting justice for them.

Even the innocent lives he took weren't in vain, as they acted as a deterrent for the vast majority of people who committed crimes, and crimes like sexual assault and domestic abuse weren't let off just

because certain world governments didn't think those kind of crimes were worth their time, but it wasn't like there weren't flaws in that system besides false convictions and questions about the dubious morality of killing people at all.

The US, in particular, had a crazy amount of people in prison and Japan had a brutal 99.8% conviction rate even if their violent crime was much lower compared to the US and Japan did also have quite the problem with violent or abusive suspect questioning methods. Governments were also just *sending* him names near the end and he wasn't naive enough these days to think that there weren't some people just thrown onto that list that the courts hadn't properly investigated or that someone with money didn't just want gotten rid of.

Also, third-world countries had a lot less information available to the public about domestic crimes, and Light hadn't sent informants to keep an eye on things there firsthand, which might have mitigated that weakness somewhat, so they didn't have his "protection" as much as first-world countries.

That was the heart of the dilemma that the idea of Kira had always brought up and why it proved so divisive to the human population.

It was incredibly flawed, it was, but so was traditional government. Even if Light no longer believed he was unquestionably right about things, able to question himself, he still had his own beliefs at the end of the day. Even as a Shinigami, he hadn't looked at the human's attempts to govern themselves and thought it particularly successful.

As crass and self-serving as his acts ultimately were in that timeline, they got results. Undeniably this success was crafted by sacrificing individuals for the whole good and that didn't sit completely right with him, but he still got better results than organized government ever had and they were results that the whole of the world got to enjoy in the closest thing to peace that humanity - the chaotic

cacophony that they were - would ever know.

And the biggest advantage to that peace was the ability for people to not have to lock their doors at night or to be able to go out without constant justified fear of being harmed by someone else. Because there was a giant hammer resting above them all, should anyone try anything funny.

It was enough to write a dystopian future novel.

He *knew* this and yet he couldn't find it in himself to be disheartened. If anything, it spurred him on. If his life had no destined path, then he was free to do whatever he wanted with it! If existence had no inherent meaning, then he could think up a meaning of his own for it!

Maybe Light wasn't a writer, but just like any writer, he would assert that there was nothing more inspiring than a blank page, there for you to write down whatever came to mind with reckless abandon!

But that did bring up the question of what to do this time as Kira. His Shinigami side that whatever he did wouldn't matter anyway so he could do whatever, and his human side optimistically insisted that each action had an effect and a consequence and he needed to take into account both of those.

One side said that not everything - practically nothing - can have meaning and the other asserts that everything has at least the potential to.

Light gently rubbed his forehead as he felt a small headache start to form. Both beliefs were clashing in his mind, warring for dominance but neither could win because neither was wrong. It wasn't wrong to not want to obsess over the significance of everything in existence and

it wasn't wrong to *care* .

And he didn't want to be the person that willingly sacrificed the innocent anymore, even if it was the most direct path to saving the most people. He wasn't his old self anymore who only happily saw one way of doing things.

So how did he move forward from here? Not just as only Kira or as only Chronos, but both? How did he do this as *Light?*

Light glanced down at the Death Note. Somehow, seeing it comforted him. It was just a dark item that could be used to "cull the herd" of humans, but it brought him ease. Maybe it was just the only solid idea he had to hold onto…

Well first, some ground rules. Light didn't want to risk writing his rules down since once the police (L) started investigating him, things were going to get crazy. So, he seared them into his mind instead.

1. His story - whatever it would turn out to be - would not be a battle of pride with L. This wasn't some game to play together, even if Light secretly was going to have some fun with this anyway. He could maybe still use some select criminals to send messages, but killing criminals every hour on the hour just to taunt someone is just too far.
2. It also wouldn't be a battle for survival. If he died, he died! That was the benefit of no longer feeling quite so human as before. He wasn't afraid to die, this world wasn't his only one. Besides, he'd already died twice already, what's a third? He wouldn't kill to extend his own life, only someone else's.
3. He needed to look into the people he killed, no exceptions. False convictions happen, people who look guilty as sin could be innocent as angels, it happens. Innocent people will die with this route, just as they do every day, but he needed to do his research so that no one died because he was lazy or because he just didn't care. That meant he couldn't kill in the proportions

he had before, but that was alright. If he killed criminals with just heart attacks, then it wouldn't take much longer for the world governing bodies to notice, anyway. This leads into the next rule:

4. He wouldn't knowingly kill someone innocent. No killing officers who had the gall to fight against him, no killing civilians who had the temerity to disagree with his beliefs, no killing allies who had served their purpose and were just liabilities now, and absolutely *no killing FBI agents.*
5. The last one isn't a rule, but Light noted it, anyway. Past him was an idiot! Everything would have been fine on the FBI Investigation Into The Police And Their Families issue if he'd just laid low and let the agent write his report. He hadn't done anything suspicious warranting further investigation until he'd killed the twelve agents!

Light reviewed his mental notes and decided that was good for now, he'd internalized all of the important stuff. Light glanced outside and saw that the sun was starting to go down. He still wasn't sure when the assault at the convenience store happened, but he might as well get there early.

Light walked to the nearest convenience store to his house, the one it happened at, and milled about inside for a while. He mostly hung around the magazine rack as the night got later, more so staring out the glass windows than at the actual magazines. Light imagined feeling the Death Note in his bag heating up as his energy ramped up. The brunette forced himself to breathe in and out deeply, but he'd lost a lot of his ability to control his outward emotions when he became a Shinigami.

Finally, he heard the yelling and his eyes sharpened into focus. *There it is* .

A small group of bikers were loudly harassing a sweet-looking woman who was standing on the curb just in front of the convenience store.

“Hey, Pretty Lady!” The leading creep greeted. “The name’s Takuo Shibuimaru!”

“I-I don’t want any tr-trouble…” The poor woman tried.

“You hear that? Ha! She doesn’t want any trouble!”

It was like rewatching an old movie he’d forgotten almost everything about and from there it escalated incredibly fast. Two of the men used an iron bar across her neck to hold her down while she gasped and struggled and the leader announced he was going to “strip her down right here” and started trying to open her fly while she desperately attempted to stop him.

Light gnashed his teeth in rage at it all. He hadn’t needed the announcement, of course, since he could see the man’s name and lifespan above once he was in sight, but at least it bought him some time. He immediately started writing down the name, going as fast as he could.

“No! Stop! Please!” The woman (Aina, he could see her name was) screamed in terror as the men made grotesque sounds of joy at what they were doing. “HELP ME!” She cried out in desperation.

I’m working on it! Light replied mentally with as much desperation, finally finishing the last of the conditions for Takuo’s death.

He had briefly considered on the walk over to the convenience store killing this man with a heart attack, considering he didn’t need to test if the Death Note was real this time, but if he did that, the woman might just stand there in shock as he collapsed instead of running away as she did before. If that happened, she might still be in danger at the end of it all and he wasn’t risking her like that. He did it the

same as the previous timeline.

The woman managed to break free of the group, thanks to the aid of the Death Note making good on his death conditions, and took off into the street with precise timing. The leader laughed and zoomed off after her, he never saw the truck coming but his teammates did. *Too bad.*

The woman continued running, as the truck missed her by a few feet. She was traumatized as hell but physically unharmed as she got away.

He could get the other ones since he could see all their names and faces, but that would be enough for now; he didn't need a pile of bodies in front of the convenience store. They were in shock from their friend's death and the woman was running away.

Light took a long moment to write each of the panicking men's names down in his Note, specifying the time of death to be staggered over the coming week but leaving the method down to a heart attack.

Light clapped his Note closed and gave a satisfied smirk.

~ ❶ ~

Five days passed him like a blur. He'd barely written any more names in the Note and instead focussed on researching potential criminals. There were thankfully a good amount of criminals he *didn't* have to do any research on if he knew where to look for them so he wrote one of those per day, along with scheduling many of them ahead of time.

People like convicted serial killers, serial rapists that had quite the rap sheet for evidence, and people who - guilty of their convictions or not - he could see had almost nothing left to their lifespans. These were people he didn't need to worry about writing down as much.

What Light had spent most of those five days researching, in particular, were criminals he remembered being broadcasted during the time there were cameras in his house. Remembering what happened with L, the surveillance, and then the imprisonment meant also remembering how hard it was to kill new criminals without revealing the Death Note and how he'd resorted to killing petty criminals out of desperation. Which is something he would absolutely not do this time around.

If L chose the same method of information gathering as last time, Light now had an additional advantage: more knowledge. Light had also done some digging retroactively after he saw the cameras in his room were removed to find any serious criminals he might have missed while playing his game with L. That, of course, was before the To-Oh ceremony where everything changed pace.

Light used what he could remember of the news reports from that period and his late-breaking research to find the individuals again. Many were already being charged for their crimes, although they weren't yet convicted. He knew that happened though during that time, so if he could weed out the less serious crimes and the ones he wasn't sure they were guilty of, he could write those criminals' names down early and schedule them in advance for the time the cameras are in his house.

He could not watch any news or touch the Death Note at all during that entire time and brand new, *serious* criminals would still be dying because time travel gave him access to future information. So he researched on his off time from school, which was a bit hard to get back into, even if the schoolwork was easier than ever.

As the fifth day rolled around, Light wondered if Ryuk would come as he did before. Would it be wrong if he was truly hoping for it? Ryuk…was the closest thing to a friend he'd ever had, in both lives. He was the only being he could ever be himself with and be accepted for it all.

Light was stopped at the door by his mother, holding out her hands without a word and her eyes closed. It took Light an embarrassing amount of time to realize what she wanted, staring at her for nearly a full minute, before he got that she wanted that stupid test he had that day.

The brunette realized that he had never noticed in his previous life how little attention his mother had ever paid attention to him as a person. She took the test, gushed to him about his score being the best, and then took off to go call her friends and tell them. She called out to him as Light ascended the stairs to his room, asking if he wanted something special to celebrate, but it felt to him like small comfort given that she hadn't even asked him about his day or how he felt.

He called back down to her that he wanted apple pie for dinner without breaking his stride. He knew she would think that was a very strange request from him, but he also knew that she would do it anyway, so he went straight to his room to wait for Ryuk. He would wait for him.

At some point, it started raining buckets and lightning was flashing. He had his table lamp lighting the room a little, but every so often the lightning would make the room flash brighter for a few seconds. Light waited, staring at the clock as it ticked, even though he didn't know when his Shinigami friend would show.

"Boo." Someone announced in a deep voice behind him, accompanied by the soft sound of wings flapping. Light jerked in his seat and hit his stomach against the desk. Coughing, the teen turned around and saw

who he had longed to see.

“Ryuk!” Light cried out, seeing the Shinigami looming just behind him.

“Light-o!” Ryuk called back, his tone happily mocking Light’s own. That pulled him up short and not just for the obvious reason.

“You--Ryuk, you remember me?” Light breathed out, his caramel eyes widening.

“Sure do!” Ryuk laughed, his voice gravelly. “And it seems you do, too.” He sounds inordinately pleased with this fact.

“But...how?” Light asked, taking a step closer.

Ryuk shrugged. “The Shinigami realm is separate from the human realm. Time works there differently and if a timeline is restarted in the human realm, it doesn’t affect our realm.” The Shinigami paused here and gave Light a significant look. “Or us. We Shinigami don’t have our memories affected by screwups in the timeline as human’s memories are.”

Light was shocked into silence shortly. “But Ryuk, I *am* human now.” He reminded, but there a hint of being unsure in his voice.

“Ah,” Ryuk made a dismissive gesture. “You may look like a human, but at your core, you’re still a Shinigami. That notebook you’ve been writing in isn’t mine and it isn’t Sidoh’s, ours were unaffected by the human world’s time getting reset. That notebook there is yours, no other Shinigami’s. It followed you. It would probably still have the

names you wrote down in it as Chronos if it hadn't gotten sent back into time with you." Light followed Ryuk's gaze to the Death Note on his desk, feeling happiness spike in him at Ryuk's words. The Shinigami continued.

"Since you're like this right now, you can probably get away with a little bit more, like killing humans without a Death Note and saving their lives without sacrificing yourself for them, but that only makes you part human. Hey, don't forget that, okay? You're still one of us at the end of the day!" The *other* Shinigami rested a clawed finger over Light's heart.

Light felt his eyes moisten and he rubbed the tears away as they felt. "Yeah." Light allowed, feeling warmth swell in his chest for a second. "I'll try not to forget that." He never wanted to.

A second ticked by and then in a burst of movement, Ryuk closed the distance between them and wrapped Light's small human body in a feather-and-leather hug. "I was happy to see you here when I looked down at the human realm after your notebook disappeared. I missed you, Light." The Shinigami whispered, as soft as his voice could go.

Light, who had frozen during the first part of the hug, melted into it at his friend's words and wrapped his own arms around Ryuk's back. "Missed you, too." He found himself saying and he meant it.

It was so nice to have him here. He felt...alone...without Ryuk.

"You're planning on sticking around, then?" Light asked, almost rhetorically. Ryuk answered anyway.

"Of course! Let's give the other Shinigami a show!" Ryuk growled with a fierce grin.

“Didn’t think of that!” Light laughed, wondering how many of the other Shinigami would be watching his actions as Kira from the Shinigami realm this time. “Better get started then, maybe you can help me scope out some prospective criminals since they can’t see you? I have a lot of planning to do in the next month.”

“What happens in a month, Light-o?” Ryuk asked curiously, hovering over his friend.

“Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten, Ryuk.” Light gave his best buddy a close-eyed smile, his tone lighthearted. “I haven’t forgotten.”

Light then turned just his head to peer over his shoulder at the dark screen of his personal tv, remembering a certain “nationwide” broadcast. Ryuk couldn’t see his face, but he heard the wistful tone in Light’s voice as his next words eeked out from his lips in a petal-soft whisper. “I haven’t forgotten, at all.”

Disconnect

Chapter Summary

> The Lind. L. Tailor Murder happens and Kira is more knowledgeable than L had anticipated.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

L settled down on the floor of the nearly empty room, prepared to stay there as long as it took to get the information he needed. Everything was set up, it was time.

L sat in front of a laptop. Positioned behind said laptop was a television set, turned to a specific channel. Black irises watched the news channel unblinkingly as they went about their mundane business until suddenly the news was interrupted. A man came on-screen reading from a sheet of paper, looking almost scared and L smirked.

People in the news office raced around behind the man in a state of panic, clearly trying to figure out what was going on since L knew for a fact they didn't get any warning for this.

A pale thumb found its way to slightly less pale lips and pressed down. *Now's the time,* L thought to himself. *The stage is set, the curtain is rising. Kira, what will you do I wonder, when put under a little pressure.* He stared unblinkingly at the screen as Mr. Lind L. Tailor came onscreen, looking serious and focused.

Honestly, the convict looked much like the police officers who'd arrested him when put in a suit. He was handsome and solemn, exactly what L figured most people expected the Great Detective L to look like. The detective's smirk tugged wider in amusement at the thought. All in all, Mr. Tailor was an excellent red herring to draw out Kira.

The question was, what would happen now?

L was sure that Kira would take the bait if he could. He'd written the lines of Mr. Tailor's speech to be as inflammatory as possible and someone who hated criminals with a murderous passion would not take well to being called evil. Someone killing off criminals was clearly on some self-righteous mission to cleanse the world.

No, the question wasn't if Kira would get mad enough to kill Taylor, the question was if he actually could.

To do so, unless there was some other option L had failed to consider, he would have to possess psychic powers. His suspicions that Kira needs a name and a face to kill an individual also gave credence to that idea, as being able to kill anyone with only a name and a face in a way that doesn't involve hiring an assassin sounds remarkably like the rules made up in many fantasy novels. It simply didn't make sense otherwise.

Yet...was he really supposed to believe that? That Kira had some heretofore unheard of psychic power to give people heart attacks with the limitation of knowing their name and face? Such things should not be reasonably possible, it went against everything L had come to believe in his life.

No, it would be woefully inaccurate to say that he truly believed Kira was capable of this...but he had to test it. He had to be sure and regardless of what abilities - psychic or otherwise - that Kira had, his method of killing would be made clearer with this method of testing. L would likely come away with more clues than he'd gone in with.

No details should be discarded without analysis and no conclusion

could be ignored without proper investigation. L simply had to test it and not perfunctorily, either. That was the purpose of this little stunt with Lind L. Tailor. The news station L was commandeering knew nothing about what was about to happen and even the Japanese police didn't know much about his plans. Only L knew what he had in store for Kira…

L's internal monologue quieted as he observed Mr. Tailor's speech as the man began to speak, his full attention on the condemned criminal acting as bait.

"I head up an international police task force which includes all member nations, I am Lind. L. Tailor." The slightly tinny voice of the man came from the small television. He spoke with confidence, which L could appreciate. It was almost too bad that his crimes already had him on death row, he would have been useful to L if he could have recruited him. *"Otherwise known as L."*

"People all around the world are being killed by a serial killer. I consider this to be the most atrocious act of murder in history. I will not rest until the person or persons responsible are brought to justice. Kira, I will hunt you down. I ***will*** *find you."*

Just because L was using a proxy for this little test of his didn't mean he wasn't going to use the opportunity to make some promises to Kira. Although Mr. Tailor was only a fake L, the words he had written for the man to read were more or less how he truly thought. Barring, of course, the lines he wrote in just to get a reaction out of Kira.

"Kira, I've got a pretty good idea of what your motivation might be and I can guess what you hope to accomplish," Tailor started gearing up. L leaned a little closer to the tv set. This was the big one. *"However, what you are doing right now, is evil."*

L watched. Several very long moments passed with nothing happening.

As the seconds ticked by L at first thought they felt longer than they were, but then a minute passed by and then two. As the two-minute and ten seconds mark hit, L began to bite his thumb. Perhaps this should be taken as support for the conclusion that the idea of Kira having psychic powers was indeed as absurd as it sounded.

Maybe Kira wasn't in the Kanto region of Japan. That was quite possible since the only reason he was running this in the Kanto region first was its status as Japan's most populous area. At any rate, I expected his plan to go well overall but there were always a few snags. He'd wait a minute and then he'd have Mr. Taylor read the closing notes and try again, this time broadcasting in a different area. Kansai is next on the list…

Taylor stood up.

L's mind jerked to attention and directed itself wholly towards the man whose eyes suddenly looked much more vacant than they had a moment earlier. L was intrigued.

"I am not the World's Greatest Detective!" Taylor proclaimed in a loud, clear voice. He sounded more like he was just reading lines than he had during the entire first half of the broadcast and what he said caused L to pop forwards towards the TV. *"I am a convicted criminal set to die today, being used as a pawn by L. L is cruel for scheduling my execution to happen on live TV!"*

Taylor's eyes lost their blank look as he jerked in pain and let out a grunt. His hand clenched in his shirt above his heart and then collapsed harshly against the desk he'd been provided with. The whole news office was deadly silent, one could have heard a cockroach

coughing. Perhaps people were talking and they had temporarily muted the broadcast from their end, L didn't bother checking.

The detective stared wide-eyed, mouth gaping at the screen. What had just occurred was…

L's hand shot forward before he was even consciously aware of it and flew across his laptop's keyboard. The tv screen in the room switched from the view of Mr. Taylor's body being carried off-screen by representatives of law enforcement to a white screen with a capital L in black stamped on it, L's symbol.

L gasped out the words his brain told him he needed to say, even as he felt he was working more on instinct. What had just happened was… "I had to test it just in case, but I–I never guessed it would actually happen." The detective spoke into his microphone, hearing his own computer-modulated voice coming quietly from the tv set.

L's shock might have been making his words come out a tad more honest than they otherwise might have been, so he quickly covered by moving forward with his monologue. "Kira, it seems you can kill people without having to be there in person. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't just witnessed it." Seeing was believing, after all.

And how painfully true that was. L had made his life about his detective work and his open-mindedness had served him well, but being open-minded and truly believing that something unbelievable would occur were completely different things. L felt his own heart pounding rapidly in his chest, but he didn't want to move either of his hands to give in to the urge to rub the spot of his shirt over his heart. L was baffled and the fact that Kira could truly kill people without touching them wasn't even half of what was getting him so upset.

"What you said about Lind L. Tailor, that is correct." It felt like a

defeat just to say the words, conceding to Kira when their fight had only just begun. L would pay him back for it later in their game, but to have sustained a blow to his side so soon into it… “He was indeed a Death Row inmate who was scheduled to be executed today. I will admit...I don’t know how you knew that or if it was just a lucky guess, but your assumption was nonetheless correct, he was not the Detective L. I am."

L would need to think about that after the broadcast. Tailor had been arrested in absolute secrecy, so there was no way that - should Kira be a civilian - the killer would have heard about him online or in the news.

That brought to mind two obvious but singularly discomforting conclusions: Kira either had more psychic abilities that allowed him to access information that he shouldn’t be able to get and he was all the more dangerous for it or Kira was or was working with a member of upper-level law enforcement. If the latter were true, they would have to be very high up indeed to have access to that knowledge.

If the former conclusion was true, then it made what L was still planning to do next all the more dangerous. If L wasn’t confident in his observations that no one whose names weren’t broadcasted or whose names were spelled incorrectly had died, he would back out now and form a new plan. As it stood, he was so confident in his scrutiny of the deaths that he was certain there was only a sliver of a chance Kira could actually kill him without his name. So…

“I assure you, regardless of the trick I’ve just played, L is real and I *am* L. Now. TRY TO KILL ME!” He declared into the microphone with confidence, his voice coming out much more powerful than he suspected people were used to hearing from him.

He didn’t pause to see if Kira would be able to kill him, although as he continued his taunting and didn’t feel like he was dying, he gained speed. “What’s wrong? Hurry up! Come on, right now! Kill me! Come

on, Kira, kill me!" Still nothing, which was to be expected, but… "Can't you *do it?* " L couldn't stop thinking about what happened with Mr. Taylor not two minutes ago.

Kira was subtly trying to turn the tide against L and pressure him that way. If nothing else made that clear, then it was definitely Kira calling L cruel using Taylor. The fact that Kira could apparently control people before they killed them was something that L had never even considered before. It was a startling revelation and one that was freely given to him by Kira, making him wonder why the killer had gone through with it. What plan could he be feeding into by doing that?

Kira choosing that route could mean good things for L since that meant Kira was feeling attacked (which was entirely the intention) and, more importantly, felt that the power dynamic between them was too unequal and so was attempting to balance it out. It meant Kira was afraid. However, that was both an annoying and an effective power move that might actually cause some trouble for L, especially if they were to persist in it.

Kira exposing Taylor as a criminal was also likely only done as a *PR stunt* to keep the public on his side, L didn't think Kira would have stuck to his supposed ideals if L really had appeared on the news report himself. Still…L couldn't ignore the fact that he hadn't proven Kira would go against his morals at a moment's notice. L had intended to prove that Kira would kill people he believed to be working with law enforcement solely for the crime of working against them, but Kira had thrown that back in L's face with their reversal.

"Well, Kira, it seems that you can't kill me after all." L continued slowly, but his mind was torn.

If anything, at least to other people, he'd proven that Kira would see through any deception, stick to their ideals, and only kill criminals or those who had done wrong. No matter how he knew, Kira had definitely known Taylor was a criminal when they had killed him

instead of buying the trick that it was the real L.

L couldn't prove to them that Kira had tried to kill L just now and had simply been unable to do so. He would need to fix that, need to show people that Kira wasn't as righteous as they liked to portray themself, but he could let the court of public opinion go for a moment.

What he couldn't let go of was the fact that *he* didn't know the truth of the matter. "Or maybe it's...that you *won't* kill me? Is that it? I wonder if the reason I'm alive right now isn't due to your abilities, but rather to some conscience you think you have? How *noble* of you, Kira. To spare my life. It's sweet, really, but there's a problem I'm afraid. No matter what you think, what you're doing is evil and no amount of shallow nobility is going to balance the scales of your morality."

L took a small breath and then continued. "Regardless of whether you can or can't kill me, you've still given me a useful hint about your identity. I must thank you for that, Kira."

While psychic powers were now on the table, the fact that criminals whose names weren't correctly known didn't die clearly indicated that Kira isn't all-knowing. That in turn meant that the most likely explanation for how Kira knew what they did about Taylor being a criminal was either them being or being close to someone higher up in the chain of law enforcement. It was indeed a useful hint, L hadn't truly considered before this that Kira could be that well connected.

"Let me return the favor." L continued smoothly. You seemed to know a great deal about Mr. Taylor and his circumstances, so stop me if you know this too. Although this was announced as a worldwide broadcast, the truth is we are only broadcasting in the Kanto region of Japan." L smirked, wondering just how Kira was reacting to this information. At any rate, this should even their odds a little bit more.

“I had planned to broadcast this message *around the world* until we found you, but it looks like that won’t be necessary. I now know where you are.” He sounded quite smug, even to himself. L was very pleased with himself, even if he wasn’t quite happy with the situation itself had turned out.

“There’s more. The police treated your first killing as an unrelated incident, but in actuality, the first of your victims was a suspect in Shinjuku. Looking back, he was the first criminal to die of a heart attack that we could find. Furthermore, his crime was only ever reported inside Japan. I used that information to deduce this much: You are in Japan and your first victim was little more than…an experiment.”

L’s smirk widened at his next deduction. “Which means that you haven’t been killing for very long. We decided to broadcast in Kanto first, due to its large population, and luckily we found you.”

And since Kira had injected some of their own thoughts and feelings (ignoring the question of if they were true) into their confrontation when they were controlling Taylor, L decided to reciprocate. “To be *completely* honest with you, I never expected you would show yourself so quickly, but…it won’t be too long now before I will be able to sentence you to death.” L hoped Kira was feeling even more threatened now, L had every intention of making good on that promise.

“Naturally, I’m *very* interested in how you’ve managed to commit these murders without being *present* , but I don’t mind waiting a little bit longer. You can answer all of my questions when I catch you.” The voice modulator managed to cover the glee that was actually in L’s voice when he said that.

“Let’s meet again soon, Kira.” L whispered and turned off his mic. Less than a second and two keyboard taps later led to the signal for the entire tv channel being turned off too with static replacing it.

And L was left in the silence.

That hadn’t gone remotely how L had thought it would. He was certain the Japanese police, while not happy that Kira was indeed hiding in Japan, would be inordinately pleased with the information L had gotten from that one encounter. However, L’s mind was still furiously going through everything he had just witnessed. From the fact that Kira truly could kill someone without coming into contact with them, to their additional astounding ability to control people’s words and actions before they died, L had a thought to think about.

And the unexpected ground Kira had managed to gain at the beginning of their confrontation rankled the detective.

L could acknowledge he was being childish about it, but he lacked a desire to change that. What desire he did have was to kick Kira down after the leverage they’d managed to gain against him.

He continued to sit in the darkened room lit only by the screen of his laptop and thought about it all.

What should his next move be?

Chapter End Notes

And Light's passion project of fucking with L officially begins.

Reminiscence

Chapter Summary

> Light relaxes after the Lind L. Tailor incident and thinks about a certain someone.

Chapter Notes

> Would you believe me if I said that I've had this chapter finished since less than a week after I finished my last one and it's just taken this long for me to get around to proofreading and posting it?

Light smirked as he leaned back in his desk chair. It had finally happened, the Lind L. Tailor broadcast.

It hadn’t been a busy day, which had made waiting for this moment all the harder. Light had practically been a nervous wreck all day. Of course, Ryuk had been the only one who knew him well enough to actually notice.

Now that it was over though, all he could do was wait it out and see what changed because of what he did. It wouldn't make or break anything, he figured, but there was something at stake.

There was comparatively little risk in his plan considering what he was used to, but if this *did* go wrong, then he would cement into L's mind the idea that Kira wanted him dead, cement into the police's minds that they and their loved ones could be killed at a moment's notice, and overall harm his cause in many people's eyes.

If it went as expected, though….well. He would certainly come out better than L for it.

Ryuk crawled around on the ceiling behind him, chewing on an apple that Light had tossed up there a moment ago.

Light had briefly entertained the idea of not killing Tailor during the broadcast, but only really because he couldn't verify the man's crimes for himself and so he was almost flying blind on this matter.

Thanks to L being an entitled jerk, Tailor had been arrested, tried, and convicted of his crimes without any information about him being released anywhere to the public. It was honestly rather unnerving to Light on an empathetic level as well as a legal one. He felt more than a small pang of sympathy for Tailor, whatever the man might have done to land himself on death row.

Back in his previous life, Light had heard L explain that Tailor was an inmate whose execution was scheduled for that day and that he had been arrested with the utmost secrecy, but Light at the time had been far too distracted by the fact that he had been tricked by the real L to bother himself with thinking about what the implications of those facts meant for the dead man.

This time around, Light was far less full of himself and he liked to think that gave him a little more clarity looking at this situation than before. In the weeks leading up to when the broadcast would take place (and it did, in fact, take place at the same time as before), Light found himself thinking more and more about what Tailor had gone through and why he had gone through it.

Maybe Tailor shouldn't be getting so much sympathy, given his criminal status, but Light couldn't help it. It was just…

Although the words Light had had Tailor say on live TV had been one big power play by Light, the brunette had meant what he'd said when he'd called L cruel. Yes, it was done to unsettle L and to draw the

public and the police's attention more to the terribleness of L's actions, but one could argue that L truly *was* cruel, even if the detective wasn't particularly trying to be.

Leading up to the broadcast, the implications of what L had revealed to him in the first timeline settled now in Light's mind in a way that they simply hadn't before. Those implications were a doozy, but given L's propensity towards unlawful arrests and torture, Light wasn't necessarily surprised.

How fair could Tailor's imprisonment and trial really be if the information on his crimes and detainment were truly on a need-to-know basis? Utmost secrecy usually meant that not even lower-ranking law enforcement officers were privy to the information. How lawful would his conviction and execution have been in light of this information, regardless of his guilt?

Light was also referring to a particular decision of L's when the word cruel had popped into Light's head. The fact that L had used Tailor as a stand-in for himself to lure out Kira had been the thing that really struck Light as cruel of L to do. It wasn't so much that L had been using a criminal set to die, but how Tailor was being used.

Tailor's execution should never have been scheduled to happen on live TV, even if it wasn't in front of the entire world as the newsperson initially claimed it was. Even though L had a concrete reason for it, he had turned that man's death into a spectacle, an event where it could be stared at and jeered at. Probably cheered for by some, knowing the public.

It was like they were suddenly back in the Tutor era, where people set to be executed could serve as entertainment to the populace as they died. Tailor was a person and if he had to be executed, then he should have been executed in private where his death couldn't be made a mockery of like it was here. Instead, because L had wanted something, this man's life and even his death were completely rerouted to serve

L's needs, disregarding the human rights violations made in the process.

Even if Light were to ignore what he considered to be the single most disturbing thing L had done to Tailor in his quest for clues, it was psychologically tormenting, to say the *least* , to set Tailor up to bait Kira. What must have been going through Tailor's mind as he was set up for a fall like that? The man was likely either coerced or outright forced to take part in this.

What was he feeling as he sat in front of a camera, told to pretend to be someone else, and had to bait a known serial killer into ending his life? To know he could be forced to have a heart attack at any moment? How many people would be absolute basket cases after being told that they would be actively taunting a proven killer intending to get that person to kill them? All to reach someone else's goals. Their death, a sacrifice that person was simply willing to make.

The torment would continue, too, if Light wasn't in Kanto or just hadn't responded. Judging by L's own words, Tailor would have then been forced to repeat the process of taunting an active killer into killing him over and over again, targeting different areas of Japan and then the world each time. Each broadcast taking a psychological toll that Light flinched just thinking about. The fact that Lind L. Tailor looked so stoic during his broadcast was a credit to the man, whatever he had actually been like as a person.

Light took a dim view of it all, to say the least.

And so he had considered not killing Tailor at all, for all the good it would have done the man, but Light had resolved to kill the man by the time the broadcast took place. Tailor would likely be executed that day or soon thereafter, so even if it felt yucky to Light to kill Tailor, hastening the man's death and saving him a good deal of torment was probably the better decision Light could make, given the circumstances.

Once Tailor had appeared on screen, he had seen the man's lifespan and it had convinced Light that L's words - at least on this matter - had been true. That was a concern, too, as Light knew the detective well and the man was a *liar* . A huge one.

It wouldn't have been that major of a surprise if he had been lying about Tailor's backstory, but what Light had seen had only corroborated it. Tailor's lifespan had less than a day to it, more akin to hours. He *had* been set to be executed that day, regardless of Light's interference with his natural lifespan.

There had admittedly been more to Light's thoughts about not killing Tailor. He had enough humility to admit to that.

If he didn't kill Tailor, then L would definitely look like an idiot. He wouldn't be able to prove that Kira was real and he would have inconvenienced the police for this whole charade with nothing to show for it.

Or he could kill Taylor before he was ever introduced on TV or in private after the cameras stopped rolling. That would've been another kind of success for Light, he would have still gotten to L and annoyed the older man….it just came with too many problems to be considered more seriously.

For one thing, Light was trying to save as many people as he could, regardless of how anyone else standing on the outside saw it. In the end, so many crimes were prevented by Light at least appearing as a nuclear deterrent. So many people never had to suffer in the first place because criminals were too scared of Kira...so Kira had to be a real person to them. Not necessarily a god, but certainly more than an urban legend popular on social media.

Even if it wasn't for the same reasons as in his first life, Light still felt like he needed the world to believe that someone was watching them who would punish them where the courts might not strike the same amount of fear.

Despite what L might be imagining, this battle wasn't just about beating L for Light. L was important to him, *so very important* , but so was the life of every other human being in the world who *deserved* to be given equal consideration. So Light couldn't do something he thought might end up costing many innocent lives just to make L look crazier than he knew the man could make himself look.

Light scoffed under his breath. His love could definitely make himself look pretty immoral and nuts.

The broadcast did bring L closer to coming for him, though, and Light wasn't above feeling happy about that. He missed L and he absolutely couldn't even stomach the thought of never seeing the man again, which is what he risked by spending too many big events not responding to L at all.

Light got up from his desk, at his mother's call of dinnertime. He waved a hand over his shoulder as he closed the door to his bedroom, promising Ryuk that he'd bring back a slice of apple pie for his friend.

They'd been having that for dessert quite a lot lately.

~ ❶ ~

Light didn't think about it again until he was once again back in his room. He was laying underneath his blanket and trying to get to sleep and then suddenly it was all he could think about.

The L he once knew.

The L he desperately hoped hadn't changed.

It swarmed about in his mind, as it often did, demanding to be thought about. Light could spend hours that way, thinking of what had once been.

Once upon a time, there had been... something... between Light and L. Besides hatred and animosity, anyway. When Light had lost his memories for the first time, it had been the first time in a long time that Light had cared for people beyond their usability to him.

The first time he truly looked at L.

True, the man had been presumptuous and agitating, morally tone-deaf and *dominating*, but...that was part of what made him so unique to Light. So irreplaceable. Light had enough morality for both of them and enough intelligence and empathy to understand where L was coming from most of the time.

L and Light grew marginally closer, Light remembered, even though L never stopped seeing Light as an enemy to be investigated and defeated. Light was the only one who tried to understand L as he was, he thought. The only one who challenged L enough to bring the older man to heights of emotion he'd possibly never reached.

L even started to make jokes, albeit still in his usual monotone, and he'd been the first person in a while to actually make Light *laugh*.

All of the late nights spent together, all the theorizing on their case. All that time that they spent full-on living together, practically in each other's pockets. It had eventually made Light realize how close L was to being the only true friend he'd ever had and sometimes when L looked at him a particular way...Light wondered if they were only that.

But their relationship never really progressed further than that and he wasn't sure if it would have or if they'd always be stuck in that gear of frenemies-with-romantic-tension. Light got his memories back and he never thought about it again, besides to scoff at how silly he had been without his memories. Valuing people? Ha! The thoughts of a dreamer.

But still...there were times...in his weaker moments…

Light sat up in his bed but didn't stand up. He wasn't sure if he could fight the strong urge to pace his room if he did so.

Things were different now, in both good and bad ways. On the one hand, L was alive, which was something to be eternally grateful for. It also gave Light the potential, just the potential, to get their relationship to a point that it had never reached before. Again, something to be very much grateful for.

On the other hand, L didn't know him. Light knew L with the familiarity of a close friend mixed with a family member, but on L's side, he didn't even know Light existed. And that hurt. Light thought about the detective almost constantly since awakening in the past.

In truth, L had never completely left Light’s memory even after the man’s death, but the combination of having his mind clearer and having a *chance* again made everything rise back up to the surface. And a lot was floating to the top, given how much Light knew L. He

knew L better than anyone, he was sure.

L was annoying. He was downright frustrating, even when Light was no longer interested in fighting against him. L thought through every situation with the lens of how it benefited him. It would be inaccurate to say he only did the things he wanted to do, but all of Light's memories of L doing things the man truly seemed to hate doing involved him being pressured to do so.

Despite the nature of his thoughts at the moment, Light couldn't help but smile dopily as he thought back to his confrontation with L during the broadcast. It was the first time Light and L had ever talked in the first timeline and even now looking back on it, there had been something...magical about it. Insofar as the human world could ever leave behind its monotonous nature enough to feel ethereal, of course.

L's side of the conversation changed the script in response to Light's change, but L still felt the same as before. Light was so relieved...

"I had to test it just in case, but I--I never guessed it would actually happen."

The first words Light had ever heard L say in this or any world and it caused warmth to flush in his chest as he thought back on them. Even while computer-modulated, the breathlessness in L's voice was still clearly noticeable. Whatever the reason, *he* had made L sound like that and it was a badge he wore proudly on his soul.

L's taunting had rankled Light in their first life together, mostly because L knew all of the right buttons to push, but by the end of their encounter, Light had been more excited than he could ever remember being in his whole life. A *challenger* . Someone who could make Light's life of boredom light up like a Christmas tree and L *did* . He really

did.

Back then, Light had looked down on other people, and even though Light felt nothing of the sort now, it was still clear as day how he had come about his previous delusion of superiority. He was the top student in Japan, after all. Praised for everything by everyone, from his looks to his manner, to his grades. His superficial success was all the people around him thought was important and so that's all he could recognize was important, too.

Even as he became Kira and his own identity of "Light Yagami" became more of an act to deceive others, he never really moved away from the values he was taught when he was younger, shallow though they were. Success meant being better than everyone else, after all. And if you didn't get the grades that you should with the intelligence that you had, then you were slacking. If you exited school with great grades but didn't get a great job, then it was all a waste in the eyes of others, you didn't make good on your potential.

Light's father had...tried to be that guiding influence for Light that informed him about *morality* separate from objective success, but his expectations for him got in the way. They distracted him from seeing what Light needed or wanted and kept him from truly recognizing that Light was a person that needed *help* sometimes. And he was around so rarely…

Light still loved his father, of course he did, but he wondered if there was anything he really knew about the man besides his strict adherence to his "pure as the driven snow" sense of justice. *Maybe.* Light thought to himself as he stared at his bedroom ceiling.

Maybe it's idealistic of me to think so with how many issues I had, but I can't help wondering if I could have been saved from going down that road in the first place if I'd just had at least one meaningful relationship with someone. Not Sayu, who can't seem to take much pressure emotionally before she cracks. Not Mom who seems stuck in her own world half the

time, ignoring anything troubling. Not Dad, who's gone half the time and is uncompromising and emotionally closed off the other half…

Light laid his arm across his forehead as he continued his staring. *By the time I and L got close, I'd already gone batshit **and** lost my memories of being Kira on top of that. Maybe there was nothing that could've stopped me from becoming who I did, maybe...but... is it really so wrong to think that having someone, anyone, to actually ask me if I was okay would've helped?*

Light allowed his eyes to slide closed. He had looked down on other people as being beneath him for much of his young adult life in the first timeline, that was a certainty. During the broadcast, Light had thought L would be the same as everyone else. He could even remember making a smart-ass comment about things being interesting if L had just been a little smarter...only to get the rug pulled out from under him immediately afterward when he was forced to realize that L *had* been smarter.

Because you see, L was unlike any person Light had ever met and, no, it wasn't just his intelligence that made Light think so. He had met Near, after all. Heck, he had dealt with all of L's "successors" in varying degrees after his death. If it was all about L's intelligence, two misunderstood geniuses finding companionship in each other, then it wasn't like L was the only one of his kind.

No, it wasn't just L's intelligence, it was...well, L. Everything about him. Was it possible to say that you fell in love with someone simply because they were themselves? Because L was L. He was annoying and aggressive, demanding and tone-deaf. Yet, also strangely understood people and what made them tick. He lacked social skills and had all sorts of mannerisms that Light had never seen anywhere else; they were stupid and cute and funny and effective. L's little things were all of those and more.

When Light had met L for the first time ever, it had all annoyed him.

Someone so far from the social norms that Light had been taught to value, that Light found it outright offensive. He couldn't appreciate L for who he was until he'd lost his memory of being Kira and even then, their relationship was so tense and antagonistic that nothing could ever come of it until L loosened up and then Light got his memories back and…

Well.

Light huffed and flopped around on his bed a little, trying to find a comfortable position. His recollections were getting jumbled and confused and the different timelines weren't helping anything! Everything about Light and L's relationship was complicated and probably always would be.

L was the most frustrating man Light had ever met and even when Light had no longer been capable of real love, L had still been able to get a rise out of him, inspiring more emotion than anyone else ever had. He reached into the depths of Light and pulled, trying to pull the monster out, and Light found himself clinging to the man in their fight for superiority.

But in some of the quieter moments...before Light had regained his memory...maybe not all of the emotions L had inspired from Light had been from his antagonism. If there had been times when Light had looked at L as the man was sitting hunched over in his chair or staring wide-eyed at someone and strangely thought the actions were cute?

If Light had ever asked L to turn the light on the computer down when he was trying to sleep and felt somehow honored when the man actually did? If maybe L actually said a joke in his monotone that made Light laugh and he found himself amazed by the man more than he would ever let the jerk know?

Well then, he was only strong enough to admit to them now.

And to act on them.

This time wouldn't be like last time and he would show L that he would have to step up his game if he thought he could handle both Kira and Light this time.

And Light…

…he hoped L would show Light that he wasn't wrong to love him.

Laid Plans Act 1 of 2

Chapter Summary

> Light visits the police station, talks with his father a little and meets someone special.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Nice to see you again, Light!” The man behind the reception desk greeted, happily. Funai Tsutomu, the name above his head read.

“Mr. Tsutomu, nice to see you again, too.” Light gave a close-eyed smile. The man was always ecstatic to talk to people, maybe that was why he worked the front desk so often. At any rate, Light had been seeing a lot of him since the partial-teenager had started popping up around the precinct.

“What’d you bring this time?” The officer smiled, pushing the visitor sign-in sheet across the desk towards him.

“Just sandwiches, this time.” Light laughed lightly, shaking the bento box he held in his hand.

“Aww.” Mr. Tsutomu whined playfully. “No dessert this time?”

“I thought about it.” Light admitted. “But I don’t think Dad would appreciate being on a sugar high every single day.” Behind him, Ryuk was doing his usual hover thing.

“Well, you can go on up at any time.” The officer said, pleasantly. “I’m sure your father will be glad to see you but are you really sure you

don't want to try helping with the Kira Investigation? With how well you've done in cases before, I'm sure you'd be a great help." He encouraged him.

Light gave a soft chuckle. "Maybe, but I don't think I'd like to get involved with this one. It's serious, so I'll leave it to the professionals. Besides, I've been rethinking lately about what I want in life." He said this lightly, belying the seriousness of their meaning. He gave a polite nod to the officer after that and breezed further into the building, Ryuk hot on his heels.

Once they were in the empty hallway and out of earshot, Ryuk started talking. "Do you think your dad's going to get annoyed with you persistently showing up to his workplace nearly every day?"

"I don't know." Light replied back thoughtfully, hanging his head towards the ground as he talked so that the security cameras wouldn't see him talking to himself. "As long as he doesn't try to stop me from coming here altogether, then it should be fine."

It would be, too. Annoying his dad wouldn't do Light any favors, but he could deal with it as long as it didn't mess with his current plans. This was the third week now of almost daily visits to the police precinct. He knew he wouldn't be able to keep coming up with random reasons why he was always around, so he decided from the beginning that he would frame it as wanting to take care of his Dad and make sure the man was okay because of the Kira Case. His Dad had initially insisted that Light didn't need to check on him, but Light could out stubborn the man, and Soichiro had quickly taken to letting his son do what he wanted.

Light took advantage of it, coming nearly every day and bringing his Dad any number of things, from a change of clothes to food to letters written by Sayu telling him about her day (Light's idea). Even though the things he brought were helpful, Light didn't try to hide the fact that they were mostly excuses to go to the precinct.

He let them think they knew the reasons why.

Light gave the briefest of knocks as he got to his dad's office and went in. Soichiro's eyes flicked up to the door, but he relaxed immediately when he saw that it was Light. "Ah, Light. I see you're back again." He said, by way of greeting.

"Yeah, I'm back." Light smiled and came over to the desk, placing the bento box on it when he got close enough. "I brought sandwiches this time, you're probably hungry."

Like usual, his dad seemed mildly disinterested in what Light was doing and like usual, Light wasn't sure if it was because he was so busy with work or because he didn't actually care very much about his activities. That was fine, though. Getting his dad's approval wasn't part of his plan. Even if it did make him feel a little…Light mentally shook himself.

His father had always been more dedicated to his work than his own family, Light knew this. At the end of the day, he was a good man but a lackluster parental figure. "How's the case going, dad?"

His dad sighed wearily and steepled his fingers. "Nothing new, as of yet, but L seems to have another one of his secret plans in progress." His tone got across exactly what he felt about L's secrecy. "I'm sorry, I can't say more."

Light and his father had fallen into a routine these last several weeks where Light would deliver what he had, ask his father a vague question about how things were going, and Soichiro would give him a comfortably vague answer. It was honestly more than they'd talked in the last year.

Light left the office shortly after that to let his dad get back to work, as usual, and lingered in the front area of the precinct for a while to chat with the officer at the front before walking home with Ryuk.

“What if your plan doesn’t work?” Ryuk asked, towering over the teen as they took the usual route home. "It's tomorrow, isn't it?"

“Then it doesn’t work.” Light shrugged dismissively. They could talk more freely here since they rarely passed anyone this way. “It'll be a huge waste, but not the worst thing in the world. Why? Do you think it’ll fail?” Ryuk wasn’t dumb, so if Ryuk thought there might be an issue, then he wanted to hear it, although Light was pretty confident that if Ryuk had noticed any serious problems when Light was planning this, he would have said something earlier.

“I don’t think it’ll fail exactly,” Ryuk replied. “It's very smart actually and doesn't leave much room for things to go wrong. It’s just that you never know with humans. They might not do what you want them to.”

“I get it.” Light said. “The world is a chaotic place. You can guess what people will do and most of the time you’re right, but then they’ll do something crazy right out of nowhere.”

“Damn right.” Ryuk agreed, sensibly.

That was one of the reasons why Ryuk spent most of his time floating around inside the police station these days. He was both keeping an eye on the meetings between L and the police and watching for variability. They knew the event happened somewhere around this time so Ryuk just had to keep watch until it happened and inform Light.

Light had already sent “it” and if everything went according to plan, the real fun would begin.

He could hardly wait!

~ Ⓚ ~

Naomi stepped out of the cold into the Japanese police station, her hair being whipped into her face by the wind. She was here now.

Her hands clenched into fists at her sides as he tried to calm her heartbeat. She needed to do this, she told herself. Kira was killing people and she had information that could stop them!

Even if she wasn’t an FBI agent anymore, as Raye had reminded her plenty of times, she still felt the need to do her job. Besides, with her fiance partially investigating some of the suspects, in this case, taking action here might just save him as well and for that, Noami was willing to do anything.

Officially, Naomi had followed her fiance to Japan to introduce him to her parents while they were there. However, in all honestly, she was here mostly because of the Kira case. The FBI agent in her wanted to investigate, even though she was retired now, it itched at her to do so. Plus, her fiance was now involved and she would be lying if she said she wasn’t worried about his safety.

Raye, unfortunately, picked up on this and she found herself subjected to more than a few serious talks with him about what she was not a part of anymore and what she would not be doing while they were in Japan. There was even a short time when he considered not bringing

her to Japan with him on his mission until she convinced him that she would be able to control her impulses on not get involved. She'd meant it at the time, too.

That lasted all of about a week, but she wasn't nosing around on her own this time, she was actually commissioned to help! Not by anyone official, she'd admit. She honestly didn't know who'd contacted her, but it was the only push she'd needed.

It started out like this: L himself had contacted the US government and specifically asked if they could send a number of investigators over to investigate the Japanese police and anyone tied to them. Naomi and her fiance had decided to stay in a hotel room when they got to Japan. The first week or so was pretty relaxed in activity, even though Naomi found herself unavoidably anxious.

Kira was dangerous and her fiance wasn't taking it as seriously as she really thought he should, even as he did his job well. She kept her concerns to herself though, she didn't want to worry him and she thought he would probably tell her she was being silly, anyway.

Still, even if nothing had happened yet and it looked like nothing would, she couldn't help but be ambivalent about this case. So when she opened up her email and saw a new message from an unknown sender, her FBI instincts reared up. The title of the message simply stated that it was both about the Kira Case and urgent.

She didn't know much about computer science so she couldn't test if it was safe to open herself. Instead, she sent it to an old colleague of hers asking for a favor and had her check it out. Her friend got back to her in record time with the information that there seemed to be nothing malicious attached to the email and it was safe to open. So, taking a fortifying breath, she did so.

And what was in it was Earth-shattering.

The email was comparatively short in contrast to the wealth of information it presented. The message read as such:

Dear Ms. Misora.

I hope you're well. I've come to contact you today because I have stumbled upon some information regarding the Kira case that I believe to be of the utmost importance and I didn't know anyone else I could relay it to who would take it seriously besides yourself.

I've heard that you are/were one of the best the FBI has to offer and your track record is very impressive. Please listen to what I have to say as I hope it could help the Japanese Police's efforts to stop Kira.

I believe that Kira can control the actions of those he kills before they die in more detail than anyone has suspected and that he can in fact kill in several ways, not just with heart attacks.

I know this likely sounds baseless, but I have come to this realization by looking at some of Kira's most recent acts.

Recently, two criminals have died suspiciously and I believe this unintentionally shows Kira's true abilities. One criminal, Viktor Antonov, has recently died of the flu and no one has connected it to Kira, but I think this strange. With Kira killing so many criminals, I find it strange that someone in Russia who just happened to be a criminal also just happened to die of a simple illness, one that their file says they were vaccinated for. I think that Kira, for whatever reason, wanted to keep this murder a secret and so used their abilities to kill them in a way other than a heart attack, like illness.

Another criminal, Jule Richards, died of a heart attack but engaged in strange behavior before they died. I've never heard of a mafia member clearly laying out physical evidence proving illegal dealings with a dirty cop before their death, have you? I think Kira was controlling him to do this in order to get the officer convicted. This shows an unprecedented control of someone's actions, like a script in a play. While Kira showed that they could control someone's words right before their death, these are very controlled actions and the strange actions started taking place nearly twenty four hours before their death. This indicates not only more control, but that Kira may be able to control someone's actions for a day or even days before their death instead of mere moments. Please take this seriously and please take it to the proper authorities. L, in this case. If I am right, this could be big, very big.

I recommend the police get this information on the 30th in the evening. I can't say why, but I believe this to be the most advantageous time.

Signed, A Friend.

The letter was done and Naomi was left staring in shock at her computer.

Noami had paused at the writer's assertions on Kira's capabilities, stunned by what she had read. Going further, they justified their point to her and why they thought what they did and she had to agree that the logic checks out. It really did seem like something that Kira could be capable of, given the evidence presented.

And if…

And if it did turn out to be true and Kira truly was capable of this, that information would be *invaluable* to the task force investigating Kira. It

would be an enormous help and could even help lead to Kira's capture!

Noami felt herself getting excited and had to remind herself to calm down. She took a breath. She couldn't allow herself to become too excited, she needed to evaluate how to handle this appropriately. She would have to tell her fiance. He could take it to his boss who would give the information to L and they could make good progress in the Kira case! So she did.

Except...that's not what happened.

"Honey, that's ridiculous. You're taking someone's word for it that you don't even know, they could be anyone."

But good information can come from anywhere, all of her previous experience told her that. Besides, she had a feeling that this person wasn't just anyone, they knew too much. Information on the criminal who died of the flu was readily available to anyone online, she'd checked, but no one who didn't have government connections should have known about the criminal who'd died after exhibiting strange behavior.

As well as that, they'd heard about her and managed to get her contact information, and trusted her enough to do something with the insights they gave her. All of this heavily implied that they were in the FBI and that made even more sense why they would want to keep their identity a secret.

Besides...this person...she wasn't sure what it was exactly, but they reminded her a little of L. She knew it wasn't him, of course, but they seemed so much like him that she couldn't help but want to trust this person.

“Look, Dear, we both know you used to be one of the best FBI agents there were.”

If they both knew that, then why wasn’t he taking her thoughts on this seriously?

“But now you’re just my fiance, Noami, so drop it!”

But she couldn’t. Because she knew she was right. Raye wouldn’t believe her, though, and wouldn’t hear any more about it, which was what brought her here to the Japanese police department. She had to deal with this on her own.

She walked into the police department on that cold day with her shoulders slumped but her head held high. This day was the 30th of December, three days after she had gotten the mysterious email. After realizing that she would have to come to the station herself to deal with this because of her unwilling fiance, Noami decided to go at the day and time that the email had asked her to.

The day was bitterly cold and she sighed in relief as she entered the drastically warmer building. Her eyes drifted around the department entrance, but there were very few people there; one officer at the front desk and a teenaged boy talking cheerfully to him. Good, that was good. The fewer people around, the less danger there was.

As she approached the desk, both the officer and the teenager stopped talking and turned to look at her. The teenager, in particular, looked at her with wide eyes. She briefly wondered why that was, but considering he was a teenage boy and she was a rather attractive older woman, she supposed it could have been just that simple. She quickly turned her attention to the officer and didn’t bother with the boy again.

“Hello. May I please speak to someone on the Kira Taskforce?” Naomi didn’t waste any time getting to the meat of why she was here.

“I’m sorry, Ma’am, but they are very busy people. If you have information, we would be happy to write it down and give it to them later.” The man said pleasantly but firmly.

“No, that won’t work.” Naomi asserted. “I have to speak to someone directly on the task force, it’s urgent!”

“I’m sorry,” The man said. “Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t help you see them. No one is at the task force office at the moment and none of them are answering their phones. I promise that if you leave the information to us, it will get back to them safely.” He promised.

“Please.” Naomi felt herself growing desperate. Couldn’t there be just one person who would listen to her? “I have incredibly important information for the Kira case!”

“…important information?” A soft voice from beside her said, causing Naomi’s head to instinctively jerk to the side. It was the young teenager who was still standing at the desk and was now looking at her with wide brown eyes. “You have important information for my father?”

Naomi’s brain took a second to catch up after the boy’s startling insertion into the conversation, but when it did… “Your father?” She repeated, in question. Her eyes fixed on him now.

“Ah, Light! You shouldn’t be telling people that!” The desk officer said in a panic, making Naomi wonder even more what that comment was supposed to mean.

“I think it’s alright, Mr. Tsutomu,” The boy said to the officer, still maintaining a quiet and peaceful demeanor. “I think it might be a good thing to tell her this.”

“What do you mean, Light?” The officer - Mr. Tsutomu - asked him, eyes darting to her uncertainly.

“Well…I could be wrong, but I think the real reason she doesn’t want to give you the information is that no one knows who Kira is or what kind of connections they have. So far Kira has shown at least some ability to get confidential information, so you might be able to understand why she wouldn’t feel comfortable giving this information to anyone outside of the task force, even an officer.”

The boy - Light - gave a soft smile to the officer that felt like it was asking the officer to try and understand her better and it seemed to work. The officer’s shoulders relaxed just a little, although there was still some tension in them.

Then Light turned back to her and gave her a secret little smile, playful. “Well, am I right?”

She stared at him for a few seconds, unsure what to do but as he continued to look at her, she found herself nodding in agreement. She immediately wondered if she had done the right thing by acknowledging it, but that got swept away as the boy smiled brightly at her. Excited. She fought the instinctual urge to fight back.

“I knew it.” He said, excitedly. “You’re more careful than most. To me, that’s as good a reason as any to help you.”

“Are you sure about this, Light?” The desk officer asked, still sounding a little careful but not as worried as before Light had explained his thoughts.

“I’m sure.” Light said brightly, turning to him before turning back to her. “My name is Light Yagami, my father is Soichiro Yagami, and the officer in charge of the Kira Case.”

Naomi’s eyes popped open at the information presented to her. Could it be…? Could this really be it? Someone with connections who would finally listen to her? Now it made sense why the officer was hesitant for Light to mention his father.

She snapped out of her thoughts and hurried to introduce herself. “My name is Shoko Maki. Would you possibly know where your father is? I need to get in contact with him.” She pressed.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Maki, but I don’t know where Dad is. I was just told by Mr. Tsutomu that he’s out.” Against her will, Naomi found herself beginning to droop, but she barely had time to feel down before the boy spoke to lift her back up again.

“But I’m pretty sure I can get in contact with him if you can stand to hang around with me a bit longer. It’ll require you to trust me and my dad though, I hope that won’t be a problem.” He gave a lighthearted laugh, his eyes closed and face the most angelic Naomi had ever seen on a person. It helped her to relax.

“I-Yes, that would be very helpful. Thank you so much.” Naomi bowed deeply to him.

“It’s really alright.” Light assured her. “His cell phone is off, but I have a pager for him for emergencies. I’ll page him and see if I can get him

to turn on his phone and see what happens. I hope you understand that I can't just hand over my phone to a stranger, but I'll do my best to try to get him to meet with you. We should probably stay here until he calls."

Naomi felt herself buzzing with excitement. This could be it! This was amazing, better than she could have hoped for! She nodded in agreement and the two went over to sit in a couple of chairs in a corner of the room while Light reached into his pocket to remove his phone and quickly typed something in before putting it back in his pocket and waiting.

They sat waiting in silence for maybe only five seconds before Light leaned closer to her and said something that made her heart stutter in her chest.

"Ms. Maki, I know you gave me a fake name."

"W-What?" Naomi said, looking at him with wide eyes and maybe the slightest amount of fear.

"I know you gave me a fake name." Light repeated. He said this sternly but his features looked neither angry nor intimidating. A better word would be...steady.

If Naomi had thought about denying it, that thought would have fled immediately with just how steadily he was looking at her and how serious he was. He *knew* and she wouldn't do them both the disservice of telling him an obvious lie.

"That's right, I did." She replied, collecting herself. "I hope you can understand why. How did you know?"

Light nodded, serenely. “I do understand, that’s how I knew. Like I said before, I think you’re trustworthy because of how careful you are and a careful person wouldn’t start giving their name out all over the place with a killer on the loose who needs exactly that to kill. It would be idiotic and you are not that.” He stated this simply like it was as obvious as the color of the sky, but having been doubted so often lately, Naomi had to take a shaky breath at hearing it.

“Thank you.” That was all Naomi could say.

Light smiled warmly at her before it dimmed slightly. “I understand, but Ms. Maki, it’s like I said before, if this is going to work, you need to be able to trust me and my dad. I know it’s unreasonable to ask you to trust me so soon after meeting me, especially since you have sensitive information about the Kira Case, but we might run into trouble if you can’t.”

His big brown eyes looked up at her pleadingly and reluctantly, she found herself moved by it. “I,” Light continued, quietly. “Won’t force you to reveal your true name in order to assist you if you’re not comfortable with it. I will help you no matter what, so I don’t want you to reveal your name because you feel you have to. I want you to reveal your name because you want to take the first step towards trusting me like I’m doing with you.” He says this with conviction, his eyes boring into her own, radiating a kind of honesty she rarely saw in people. “I’m not going to force you, but I’m hoping you will.” He then leaned back and pulled out his phone, proceeding to stare at it as it remained silent. Just as he did, it began to ring and he moved to answer it.

Naomi quickly made a decision. “Noami Misora.” She said, right before Light answered the phone.

“Excuse me?” He said, looking back at her with a startled look on his

face.

Something in the expression, his sheer surprise maybe, convinced her that she should do it. “My real name, it’s Naomi Misora.” She smiled tightly.

He looked at her with wide eyes and said, “Thank you, Ms. Misora.” And answered the call. “Hey, Dad. Yeah, I figured you’d be busy. No, I’m fine, I’m not hurt, but look, Dad-It is an emergency of a sort. Dad, listen, there’s a woman here at the station who’s insisting that she meet with someone on the investigation team. No, she says that she has important information to share and she can’t talk to anyone else.”

Naomi watched as the boy talked his father into meeting with her, his father who sounded dismissive from Light’s end of the conversation. She quickly tapped his shoulder.

“Hold on.” Light said into the phone and turned to her.

“Tell him I want to speak with L directly.” She offered. “I’ve worked with him before on a case, he might remember me and if he does, he might agree to meet with me.” This could help him convince his father.

Really? Light mouthed to her and when she nodded, he excitedly smiled and turned back to the phone. “Could you ask L if he would meet with her? She says she’s worked with him before, he should remember her. Her name is Naomi Misora.”

Light waited quietly for a little bit and then began to insist, “Please, Dad. A good detective should always be open-minded and besides, I’m worried about leaving her alone. If her information is as important as she says it is or even if it isn’t, it makes her a target for Kira or a Kira

sympathizer. I refuse to leave her alone until she gets a meeting with L, Dad." Light said sternly, unwavering, and Naomi felt touched that he was going to bat for her like this.

She really was lucky to meet Light Yagami like this.

"Just ask L and see what he says, please." Light begged and leaned forward as he waited in silence while something happened on the other end of the line. Nearly a minute passed before Light suddenly stood up straight again and listened to something. Then he smiled, brightly. "You want me to...okay, I'll do that. Yeah, I wouldn't feel good about doing it otherwise. That's the hotel with the black awning, right? Okay, we'll be there in ten minutes." Then he hung up.

"My dad says L's agreed to meet with you." Light grinned at her and she felt her lips turning upwards, too. "Apparently, L is meeting with the Kira Taskforce personally at a nearby hotel. I know the one and Dad wants me to bring you there to meet L now." His smile turned a little softer as he looked at her. "I hope you feel okay with me walking you there. Neither my dad nor I feel comfortable letting you walk there alone where you could be attacked by someone trying to silence you. You won't mind the company?"

Naomi was actually surprised by how alright she was with that. It came as a surprise to her just how much she already trusted this boy. Then again, how could she not? He had come to her aid when no one else did and he was so sweet, too. He'd gone above and beyond to try and get her help even apparently going up against her father to do it. How could she say anything else but…

"I would be happy to walk with you." She smiled, her eyes alight with hope.

She felt safer already.

Light gave another small laugh and stood up from his chair, holding his hand out to her. “Well then, let’s get going. We should get there as soon as possible.”

“Yeah, let’s go.” She smiled, taking his hand.

Chapter End Notes

> So the next chapter will be used to explain what happens after we left off here and how Light had schemed to get to this point, so be excited for that! Light has launched several attacks against L in this chapter from multiple different angles and I'll try to make all of them clear in the next chapter. In the meantime, I'd love it if you guys started guessing what kind of attacks on L he was attempting to do here, as many as you can think of! It'll be a game ^v^

Laid Plans Act 2 of 2

Chapter Summary

Ryuk recalls how it all came together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ryuk flew behind Light as his friend and the woman went on their way. He was trying not to bug Light while he was talking with this Naomi woman, but it was all he could do to stop himself from cackling madly the entire walk, not that the walk was that long.

After all, Light-o's plan was truly brilliant...and interesting. So. Very. Interesting.

Light had told him outright when they were alone that he couldn't cling to the idea that things would happen the exact same way as they had in the previous timeline. Things would change, Ryuk agreed, and if he wanted anything specific to happen, he would have to make it happen.

And he did.

What Light wanted to happen, apparently, was the incident where he ran into Naomi Misora at the police station. "Don't you see, Ryuk?" Light had asked, smiling up at him in excitement. "It could be a perfect opportunity this time around if I just work it the right way!"

"Yeah? And how's that?" Ryuk asked curiously, remembering how stressed Light had been about it the first time.

Light's smile widened. "Because her appearance puts Kira in a bad position." At Ryuk's look of befuddlement, he gave a soft laugh and continued on. "Ms. Misora showing up at the police station the way she did puts a lot of pressure on Kira to stop her, anyone could see that. Not only is she coming out with some dangerous theories, but those theories are also true and that would give L an edge if he were to figure that out."

"And then," Light said, leaning forward in his desk chair. "She refuses to talk to anyone who isn't on the Kira Investigation and is actively hoping to speak to L *directly* ." He leaned back in his chair. "It's a nightmare for Kira and if he has any self-preservation instincts at all, Kira can't let her pass this information on...or live any longer, really. He *absolutely* cannot *help her.* " Light laughed. "And that's exactly what I'm going to do."

"Hold on, hold on." Ryuk held up a clawed hand. "I knew you probably wouldn't kill her since you seem to care so much about what happens to humans, but what's this now about actively helping her?"

"It's exactly as I said, Ryuk." Light replied, brightly. "Kira has too much to lose with Noami and the last thing Kira should be doing is helping her. It defies all reason, it defies all *logic* , and that's exactly what makes it such a great cover for me and a way to drive L mad!"

Light let out a small laugh that Ryuk thought might actually be a giggle. "I killed Naomi last time because she trusted me and couldn't get to the officers on the Kira Taskforce. If I instead helped her, personally connecting her to my dad and even making sure she's safe until she gets to meet him, then how could anyone - even L - argue that I'm Kira?

Especially if I manage to get her real name and be left alone with her, like last time? That would give me every motive and every opportunity to do it and the fact that she came out of her meeting with me should prove my innocence to everyone but L."

Ryuk cackled lightly. “Oh, I get it. You’re going to do something that no normal human being in your situation would do and because you don’t fear death and know almost everything there is to know about your opponents, you aren’t really incurring any risk.”

“Just that.” Light agreed. “The trouble is getting the event to occur. In the original timeline, I killed her fiance, Raye Penber, and that was what caused it. The way that I got Penber’s name made her suspicious that I could kill in more ways than a heart attack while controlling someone’s actions before their death and his killing of her fiance gave her a personal stake in taking me down.”

Light looked up at Ryuk with heat in his eyes. “But I am *not* doing that again, to either of them. So what do I do? Well…I need to cause something like that scene to happen again, as close to it as I can manage. It’ll be some trouble, but getting one over on L used to be a lot harder.” Light smirked.

“Of course, this whole thing is one big case of the domino effect. The FBI was only in Japan investigating the police because I got information that only the police would’ve known. I kill Agent Penber and that causes the Naomi Misora Incident, as well as the Video Cameras In My House Incident.

Because I killed an FBI Agent just for investigating me, that also caused most of the officers assigned to the case to walk and the rest to demand to meet L in person, which is the *only* reason that no one from the Taskforce was there to meet Misora. I just happened to be there by chance and got an opportunity.” Light said, thoughtfully.

“So how’re you going to do it?” Ryuk pressed. Light laughed and told him.

It all started with Light killing off those two criminals, breaking his modus operandi for the first time that Ryuk could see. Without the slaying of her fiance, there was no guarantee whatsoever that Naomi would come to the same conclusions as she had before, especially since Light had been faithfully killing criminals with heart attacks only.

And if she didn't then even if she still went to the police station, there would be no dangerous knowledge that would make her a threat to Kira. So the first step was to make sure she had this information, by being the one to give it to her. Light had tossed around the idea of introducing himself to Noami and telling her his ideas but ultimately decided to go the route of an anonymous email. He knew he could send one without the average person being able to trace it back to him.

He could give her a tip-off with the information he'd gathered, playing the part of someone who didn't have enough sway to bring it to the attention of the right authorities, but he needed a reason for why he had come to these conclusions to make it convincing and he couldn't expect her to take his letter seriously without *something* to back it up.

That was where the two criminals he'd chosen came in. Light could not and would not do what he had done to Raye Penbar, even if he didn't kill him, so he would use two criminals from his list to achieve the same effect. Light had a running list of criminals who he had investigated and two jumped out at him as being perfect for this if he proceeded carefully.

To give himself proof for believing that Kira could kill in ways other than a heart attack, he had a Russian criminal die under circumstances that most trained individuals would think suspicious. The criminal had already pleaded guilty and been convicted and he died in prison from the flu, even after getting medical help for it and already having been vaccinated for it.

Naturally, half of that information was only available to Light because he hacked the information, but someone reasonably high in any country's law enforcement would be able to access the databases that had this information. If Miss Misora thought about this and took it as an indication that her informant was with law enforcement, Light thought it was all the better.

No average cop or government official would tie that death to Kira though, but a particularly enterprising and open-minded individual might. That was all he needed for that one.

For the proof that he could control people's actions before they died, Light had just the two people in mind. During one of his investigations into unprosecuted criminals, Light asked Ryuk to keep an eye on this one officer in America who had raised some red flags for him. There had been some weird occurrences of a career criminal organization routinely having their members acquitted due to lack of evidence, but the same officer kept appearing in each of the investigations.

Thanks to Ryuk's help spying on the officer, Light was able to determine for certain that the officer was crooked and was getting paid off to look the other way. Light had been planning on doing something about this already and this gave him the perfect opportunity. Light-o insisted that he wouldn't kill a criminal unless they had done a serious crime befitting such a punishment, such as rape or murder, or if he believed that the criminal was about to commit one of these crimes.

The leader of this crime group that the officer was affiliated with had certainly done these crimes (the rap sheet practically wrote itself), but the officer seemed only to be guilty of this one thing. He couldn't kill him as Kira, it wasn't proportional to the crime and even if it was, Light was especially wary about killing police officers. Only the most violent offenders that owned a badge seemed to go into Light's death note, the ones that made him the most angry.

That's why this was perfect.

Light killed the organization leader using the death note and controlled him to lay out all the evidence of the crooked cop's dirty dealings (well more than the department would need to prosecute) and then had him die of a heart attack right after calling the police and telling them his address.

Unlike with the previous criminal, this death would obviously be attributed to Kira but the piece of evidence overlooked, in this case, would be the strange behavior. Again, only an enterprising individual would feel comfortable drawing conclusions from that. Together, they gave him the reasoning needed to give the information to Ms. Misora without sounding like Kira himself and getting her hackles raised.

Now, onto the more difficult part of the plan. Since the original timeline of events that got the FBI into Japan and the Japanese Police into L's hotel room had been shot to hell, Light needed to think carefully on how to get them to happen again. Getting the FBI into Japan to investigate the Japanese Police turned out to be the easy part compared to getting most of the police officers to abandon ship and recreate the circumstances that led to the police station being empty on that day that Ms. Naomi had visited.

After all, L may have always been waiting for the police force to get whittled down to only a small group of reasonably trustworthy individuals, but getting him to do that on a predictable schedule while changing everything that had led up to it was something else entirely.

Well before the event he was setting up, Light started waging war online. In his previous life, he had trolled the forums in glee, seeing all of the anonymous Kira supporters, but hadn't interacted with any of them.

Now, he was one of them.

Creating multiple fake and untraceable accounts, he pretended to be a Kira supporter and stoked the fires of the actual Kira supporters, making them bolder and more sure of themselves. A few well-placed comments was all it took for some of the more bold supporters to start raising money to make a certain product...Kira pins.

Light hadn't expected many people to wear them, but it only took a handful of individuals doing so to make the news. Light bought one in cash who promised an anonymous transaction and held onto it. Once it got to be around the right time, Light had Ryuk drop the pin in the room being used for the Kira investigation. As planned, Ryuk did this right in the middle of a meeting and dropped the pin without anyone noticing but in a spot right by the door that would be noticed immediately.

This served to reinforce the idea that someone in the police department was on Kira's side and may even be passing on information to him in two ways. One, the very fact that the pin was dropped in the interior of the police station, in a room that only people involved with the Kira investigation entered. Two, having it be noticed immediately once people tried to leave the room (which they did) meant that L was given a definitive timeline for when the pin had been dropped. If people notice it immediately trying to leave, then they can be certain they would have noticed it coming in, which would of course indicate to L that only one of the people currently in the room could have been the owner.

This easily incited the incident in question. Ryuk had kept an eye on L, making sure that L was making the decisions Light wanted him to. Light suspected he wouldn't have much time to get L to invite over the investigators after the FBI got there before Raye Penbar started investigating, the FBI agents probably wouldn't take long to get settled.

So immediately after Ryuk informed Light that L had made the request to the U.S. government, Light started working on his father. Light began visiting the police station, knowing that even if L would later find this suspicious when Light finally made it onto his radar, he wouldn't be able to convince anyone that it made Light look guilty.

Light visited the station for the first time since the Kira Investigation had started almost two weeks after the Kira pin was found, so absolutely no one could argue he had been the one to drop it or even had contact with it. There weren't going to be fingerprints on it, anyway, since Light had cleaned it off before handing it over to Ryuk to plant and Shinigami didn't have fingerprints.

If Light were to be asked later, he would insist that the thing that got him to start visiting his father religiously at the police station seemingly out of nowhere was his father coming home on the night that the Kira pin was found. Obviously, his dad didn't tell Light that anything of the sort had happened, but Ryuk had seen the whole affair and Soichiro was visibly tired and stressed.

Given the fact that the whole room full of officers had seen someone pick up a Kira pin off the floor of their restricted investigation room and the ensuing chaos of what that implied, it was pretty much expected (or so Light had informed Ryuk) that Soichiro would be home that night. Thus began Light's slow game of working his dad around to Light's view of things while making himself a common fixture in the police station.

From that family dinner onward, Light subtly mentioned things that would get the man to question if the investigation could move forward without L's explicit trust. Light knew his dad. Light wasn't going to be able to make him threaten to leave the investigation or make him believe that L couldn't be trusted, so he didn't try.

What Light could do was begin to make his dad see that the division between L and the police would only harm the investigation and that

every single day that passed with the exchange of information between them being so stilted, Kira got another victory.

Light wasn't sure how much his father would listen to him (how much his father *ever* listened to him), but Soichiro was very clearly proud of his "genius" son and had let Light help on a good amount of cases in the past, so Light knew going in that his words would have some sway over his dad if their influence was allowed to pile up over time and if he was careful about not overstepping as he did so. When the FBI got to Japan, Ryuk was one of the first to know and he loyally informed Light shortly after.

Then when Light felt the moment was right, he anonymously sent a tip to his father's computer that L had commissioned the FBI to investigate the Japanese Police, making sure to do this shortly before the FBI agents were expected to arrive so that even if L chose to no longer have them investigate the police, he wouldn't be able to stop them from coming to Japan at all and Ms. Misora would still arrive.

Light had also sent the email he drafted to Ms. Misora a few days before he sent his father the tip, and put in a part where he asked her to go to the police station on the day he would send the tip to his dad's computer and to do so in the evening, giving his father enough time to mull over the information and confront L with it. Soichiro did what Light hoped he would and immediately confronted L with this tip, asking him if it was true, all of this happening in front of his men and Ryuk.

Light had been making plans for what he would do if he couldn't engineer the right circumstances that made the police department empty of anyone directly involved with the investigation. "After all," Light had said. "I'm trying to get a really specific thing to happen. If I can't get it right, I need a passable backup plan."

It involved sending a follow-up letter to Ms. Misora, asking her to meet with him personally instead, nearby the police station, and then

revealing himself as both her informant and the son of the police chief. It wouldn't be as good as his initial plan, but it would still work well and he would still be in a position to greatly help her and prove he couldn't be Kira (to everyone but L).

He needn't have worried. The police officers were enraged and combined with the stress of finding the Kira pin, some officers immediately resigned, prompting Soichiro to give everyone in the room the option to leave. Barring one additional man that Light is pretty sure didn't join the investigation until later, all of the same people stayed behind. Which was great! But if L didn't make the same offer as before, then it wouldn't matter, anyway.

At this point, Light was visibly excited and nervous. It all came down to this, after all. Ryuk faithfully kept watch over the proceedings, looking to see if the investigators will be asked to go to L's hotel, while Light waited to hear from him. It was Ryuk's job to tell him if or when the Kira Taskforce leaves the station and if Naomi Misora shows up early. If she was going to show up at all was something Light was going to have to find out for himself.

When Ryuk came back to Light, telling him that it had *actually happened* and the investigators were gone, Light let out a large breath and found his excuse for the day to visit his father who he knew wasn't going to be at the station. He just hoped the person he was actually looking for would be.

He knew Ms. Misora would do something with the information he gave her, he just wasn't sure if she would show up on the day and during the time period he suggested. At the very least, though, he knew she was going to get involved now. From what he'd seen of her, he judged her to be a proactive individual who found it difficult to stand on the sidelines. He hadn't had much interaction with Raye Penbar, but the man's stereotypical responses to things in the last timeline indicated him to be a good man but curiously inflexible.

Light rather suspected that if Ms. Misora tried to share the email he sent to her with her fiance (a letter that really did require someone to be open-minded and open to risks) he wouldn't be as proactive about it as she would like. There was no way, in his mind, that she would not get involved.

Well, Ryuk thought. *As usual, he was right.* After all, Ryuk was now flying behind Light as he chatted with Ms. Misora and built a rapport with her. Light had her face and her real name, knew what information she had, and knew where L and the investigators were staying. Admittedly, Light already had all of that information, but now Misora knew that he knew all of that and would be able to pass it onto L and the other investigators when she got to them.

To everyone but L, who would only serve to isolate himself further if he pressed the issue, Light's character would be unassailable after this. Light not only met and didn't hurt Ms. Misora, but he was also actively protecting her by insisting she get to see L or his father and refusing to leave her side until she did. It also took away any argument L could have made about Light not being able to kill the woman because she'd told him her real name and not just the alias.

He was making a friend of her right now - and an ally. Ryuk could see she was becoming fond of his best friend, even before the two humans and Shinigami left the police station. By the time they got to the hotel, she would be even more enamored by him, Light-o could always be so charming when he wanted to be!

Light-o had assured him that L would still try to attack his character anyway, even without a leg to stand on, and their war would be all the more entertaining for it. Ryuk found himself hard-pressed to disagree and he felt his smile stretch further at the thought.

Light really did have the best ideas.

Chapter End Notes

I hope I delivered for you guys and explained everything I needed to (i.e. I tried not to forget anything). I hope you liked it ^v^

Connections

Chapter Summary

> Light pulls back and he thinks of someone else he hopes to see again.

Chapter Notes

> Honey, I'm home!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It must be nice visiting home after being gone for so long.” Light commented, liking the smile that got from Naomi. She was smiling a lot more during this conversation than she had during their lost one, but that was to be expected since he spent that entire conversation manipulating her into a state of desperation and then ended it by killing her. A particularly uncomfortable thought, especially since Naomi had quickly shown herself to be a pleasant person.

He regretted that he didn’t get to know her like this in his past life. She had just finished telling him about what brought her to Japan in the first place, something he hadn’t known until now. Apparently, she was born and raised in Japan but had moved to America after she got a job offer from the FBI. She’d worked for quite a few years and had been happy in her job, but she’d been so busy that she rarely got to visit her parents back here. When her fiance got called over here for his job, they agreed that she’d tag along with him so that she could see her parents and introduce her love to them.

“It is,” Naomi answered, readily. “I’ve been so busy for long, it will be nice to see them again and I’m especially excited for them to meet Raye. He’s always joking that he’s going to have to prove his worth to my father.”

“Raye is your fiance?” Light checked.

“Yes, he is.” She said. “We’ll be married soon.” They walked in silence for a few moments.

“So do you mind if I ask what you’re doing here, in a more literal sense?” Light asked Naomi as they walked the path to the hotel. “Why did you come here with the information that you did? I won’t ask how you got the information that you did, I do know better than that, but why did you choose to bring it in to the police station? Why do anything with it?”

“Well,” Naomi started, looking pensive. “I was an FBI agent for a long time, I guess the instincts of one are still in my bones. Even if I wasn’t on the case, once I got critical information about it, I didn’t feel right keeping it to myself. I had to bring it to the proper authorities. I brought it to my fiance’s attention first, but…he didn’t take it seriously. So I thought to take it to the police, but because I didn’t know who to trust in the police force, I decided the information couldn’t get out to anyone who wasn’t on the Kira Taskforce. Anyone, even an officer, could be Kira or working for him.”

“Absolutely right,” Light agreed with a serious nod, giving her an admiring look that she flourished under. “That’s a good call. Many people would be blinded by the idea of police officers and forget that they’re human, that they can be as immoral as some of the worst criminals at their own worst.”

“You’re right about that.” Naomi agreed, quietly. “I’ve met a lot of good people working for the FBI, but I’ll admit that some…”

“The world sees all sorts.” Light said, wisely.

Naomi looked at him in surprised awe for a second but agreed quickly enough. “I suppose that’s true. For your age, you seem very mature.” She noted.

“Thanks.” He smiled. “My dad often says the same thing. And you have a very good moral compass, Ms. Misora. I’m impressed that you took it upon yourself to do this on your own when you couldn’t get support, especially since I think I distinctly heard you say that you *were* an FBI agent?” Light said, inquiringly.

Naomi looked at him in surprise for a moment before sighing slightly and looking down at her feet as she walked. “Yes, I quit recently in preparation for our wedding.”

Why? Light wondered, deeply confused. He made a concerted effort, though, to keep his tone mild so as not to scare her off of it. “And why did you do that?”

“I…” Naomi looked confused at *his* confusion. It looked almost as if she expected him to know immediately why from that information alone. *Is there something I’m missing?* Light wondered. “We agreed that I should retire from work to take care of the home we’d have together.” She watched him as she said this. Looking for some recognition of her point, perhaps?

Well, she’s going to be disappointed. Light thought. *I still don’t get it.* “I’m sorry.” Light apologized. “I think I’m having an off day today, I don’t seem to be getting it. Could you explain a little further?”

“Well, we are planning to have children eventually…” She drew off.

Light sighed with a small amount of frustration. “I keep missing your point. What should you having a marriage, a home, and even children have to do with you quitting your job?”

If Naomi looked surprised and confused before, she looked outright shocked now. She stopped walking and stared at Light for a long minute, Light having stopped walking too. “Um…” Light started as the next minute wore on. “I hate to rush you, but I’m sure my father and the other investigators will get worried if we take too long to get there. It is a dangerous business.” He cautioned her.

“Oh, right. Of course.” Naomi shook herself and stepped forward again, with Light taking up beside her. “I’m sorry about that.”

“It’s alright.” Light gave her a small smile. “But what was it about?”

“Well, it’s just…” Naomi struggled with what to say, but she plunged ahead. “I guess I just didn’t expect that. It was nice to hear, though.” She assured, hurriedly. “I guess I just sort of expected you to be of the same mind as my fiance...and I.”

“Your fiance?” Light peered at her.

“He...we decided that I should stay at the house.” She answered.

Something on her face when she said that was… “And were you happy with that? I’m sure you were great at your job, too.” Light asked.

“I...well, to tell you the truth, I don’t like the idea very much. I enjoyed my work at the FBI and it took some convincing from Raye for me to agree to it.” She sighed.

“...Do you think you made a mistake?” Light asked.

Her eyes snapped to him, wide. Then they softened a little as she whispered, “I don’t know. I thought it was for the best like he said, but I miss it. It’s harder than I thought it would be, watching people work on a case and not being able to work with them.”

Light nodded, in understanding. He wasn’t interested in being a police officer anymore, but he could understand the frustration at seeing cases mishandled or even ignored and knowing he could do better than that. And if it was in his past life, then it would have been the ultimate insult and would have eaten away at him.

“Why quit then, if you’re made for it so much? It sounds like it was what Raye wanted, not you. Or am I wrong?” He knew he might be pushing a bit much here, but the more he was hearing about the matter, the more aggravated he was getting, not that it showed.

“I guess you aren’t wrong.” Naomi sighed, clutching her bag and staring straight ahead.

“I’m sorry if I’m overstepping,” Light started, carefully. “But what you’re describing to me sounds like you were pressured into making a decision that you’re uncomfortable with.”

“It’s not like that!” Naomi turned to him with a sense of urgency. “He just wants what’s best for us moving forward.”

“But who is he to decide what is best for the both of you, alone?” Light returned with a question. “Any relationship is a partnership and I don’t think any partnership can last if it starts out with such an uncomfortable situation? It sets a bad precedent for the rest of your relationship.”

Naomi blinked at him in awe before her expression shuttered a little. “You really are quite mature for your age, Light.” She said in an almost mournful tone. “I honestly don’t know what to say. Raye is a good man.”

“Good people can do bad things.” Light said simply and left it at that. That was enough for now and Naomi continued to stare straight ahead as if the path ahead could provide the answers to her problems.

It was only a few minutes later that they got to the hotel. “Here it is.” Light announced lightly, stopping in front of the doors. “Dad said that L’s aid would meet you in the lobby and take you to the room L’s staying in.”

“Wait, only me?” She looked at him. “You aren’t coming?”

“Dad said that he got permission from L for both of us to come up, but I think it would be appropriate if I didn’t.” Light insisted. “I’m not involved in the investigation and it should probably stay that way. I’m a teenager, I should focus on school and my own well-being and...I don’t think my dad - and certainly not my mom - wants me anywhere near it. I’ll respect that and keep my distance, this is as far as I’ll go.” Light smiled, his dimples showing. “You go on inside. You’ll be alright now.” He added, softly.

Naomi’s surprised expression slowly softened into something almost...affectionate? It nearly made Light take a step back in his own shock. Had he...had he really bonded with her so much this time? He didn’t deny liking Naomi, but that look was so soft and caring, he didn’t actually remember the last time he’d seen an expression like that directed at him.

“Alright, Light,” Naomi said, nodding. “If that’s how you feel, I won’t say anything about it, but I will make sure the Task Force knows the seriousness of what you’ve done for me.” She promised. “I hope that’s

alright with you."

"Yeah." Light smiled, widely. "That's perfectly fine. I wish you all the best and...if you need anything again, you can always contact me, I'll do what I can to help. My dad can help you reach me." Light made his own promise.

"Great. Thank you so much, Light." Naomi smiled the brightest she had since she walked into the police station and they both waved to each other as she disappeared through the hotel doors.

Light hummed as she disappeared from sight and turned on his heel to begin heading back home. He didn't want to worry his mother more than he already had. Ryuk flew down to hover more level with the ground and continued following Light. "Hey, Light-o. Got a question!" He announced.

"Sure, Ryuk. What is it?" He responded.

"Why didn't you go up?" The other Shinigami asked. "Don't you want to see L? Get involved in the investigation?"

"I do want to see L," Light sighed. "But if I went up now, it would be more on his terms, he'd be able to control the encounter more. I know I can't completely control when L confronts me, but when I see L again, I want it to be when we can meet on more equal ground. As for getting involved in the investigation, why should I? Before, I wanted to get involved in the investigation because I was worried about getting caught. I don't have that worry anymore. I also liked the idea of being right under L's nose and messing with him, because I was arrogant and didn't care that L wanted me there, too. Well, I still like to mess with L, but I don't need to insert myself into the investigation like a desperate child begging for recognition." Light scoffed and shook his head at the memories. "I'll see L again, don't worry about

me. And when I do, I'll make sure he's too intrigued to ever leave me behind."

"Any ideas on how you want that to happen?" Ryuk inquired.

"A few." Light said, slyly. "And there may have been another reason why I didn't want to go up."

"Which is?" Ryuk grinned, eagerly.

"It gives my innocence an even bigger boost with the investigators knowing that I had an in for getting into the investigation room and turned it down. Miss Naomi is my character reference, but this is objective evidence. If I was Kira, I should *want* to get in there to know what's happening, but I don't. Everyone but L will be convinced like this long into when the investigation gets heated. Even my extraordinary 'luck' with running into Naomi at the police station is much less extraordinary when I've been going there so often to visit dad. Once again, no one but L will find this suspicious."

Light threw back his head and laughed, thankful the street they were on was empty. "Oh, L is going to go crazy!" Light settled and kept on walking, listening to Ryuk's chuckles.

"You're always so interesting, Light. There's not another person like you, Shinigami or human."

"I'm sure that's not true." Light said, honestly. He knew he was something, but how could anyone possibly be that unique? Hyperbole, to be sure.

“It’s true.” Ryuk insisted, with his usual grin. “Even among Shinigami, we’re all aimless, unlike you. Even when you didn’t remember your human life, you still cared about things. Maybe it was because you were young, but still. Besides, I know you know I’ve heard of Shinigami dying before you, but I’ve never heard of Shinigami being reborn like you have. You’re the first I know who’s experienced this. Breaking the mold again, aren’t we?”

Light was really surprised, he hadn’t actually thought about that. It was that special? Light allowed a small smile to tug at his lips.

“What if your boyfriend calls in help besides the FBI?” Ryuk inquired, after a few moments.

“I’m hoping he will.” Light smirked. “In fact, I’m hoping that he’ll call in someone specific. You know, when he realizes I’m too much for him.”

“Someone in mind?” Ryuk repeated, curiously.

Light nodded, cheerfully. “He has successors for a reason, right? I’m hoping L will call in Near to help, as his primary successor.”

“That’s right!” Ryuk snapped his fingers. “You cared for him quite a bit, didn’t you?”

Light sighed, but when his gaze found the street, he had a small smile on his face. “It started out of guilt, even if I didn’t understand that at the time, but yeah. I grew…fond of him, that kid.” He spoke with a thin voice.

“There was just something about his understated misery, how he never seemed to enjoy life. He rarely smiled and he had no close relationships. Even my interpersonal relationships were better than his. I think, between the guilt and being able to see every lonely moment of his life, I started wanting to protect him. Hoping, maybe, that if he had more time, he’d learn to live his life. Well,” Light huffed. “Now that I’ve started things over again, I want to see if he can’t be happier.”

“So that’s why you want him here,” Ryuk commented.

“Right.” Light nodded, looking up at the horizon as he and Ryuk headed home. “I had to watch him being miserable when I was nothing more than a spectator. Now that I’m a player again, I’m taking this seriously.”

Chapter End Notes

It's been a hot minute since I've uploaded. I've been busy, but I'm glad to be back! I hope you guys are happy to have me back!

Interest

Chapter Summary

Things aren't really shaping up for L. ^v^

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

L stared at the security camera feed as Naomi Misora and Light Yagami separated. Watari brought Naomi up to their room while Light looked at the hotel doors for a moment and then turned to walk away. At that moment, L lunged forward and paused the video, rewinding it and playing it. He got so close that his nose nearly pressed against it. There it was again!

For a split second between when Light was looking at the building and when he turned away, his eyes flicked up from the hotel doors to the higher floors. For that split second, Light's eyes landed on the very floor L and the investigators were on, almost looking right at the window to the very room. Then L watched again as Light, as if nothing had happened, turned his back on the hotel and left.

How strange.

L leaned back as Watari and Naomi finally came into the room and quickly reviewed everything that he knew so far about this situation. Naomi had come across some important information relevant to the Kira case and just so happened to come to the police station on the same day at the same time that L had invited all of the remaining members of the Kira Investigation to meet with him personally. She also happened to run into Light Yagami, who was there at the same time.

L pressed a thumb to his lips. On the surface, it didn't seem like there was much going on here. The first was certainly a strange coincidence

but no one would chalk it up to anything more and the second wouldn't even strike most people as strange.

After all, Light Yagami had been spending a large amount of his time visiting the police station lately. Chief Yagami reported to him that Light visited multiple times a week, on differing days. No one knew that the investigators weren't going to be there, not even Light Yagami, so it made logical sense that the boy would show up to see his father and would run into Ms. Misora while he was there.

It made logical sense and yet... *something* about the situation struck him as odd. There were so many coincidences involved with the situation, such as the fact that Light chose to listen to and help her get in contact with his father. He could have just left her there or told his father about her later, but no, Light Yagami took her situation and her words seriously. Maybe he was just an open-minded kid, L told himself. A good person who couldn't or wouldn't want to leave someone in apparent trouble.

He's the son of a police chief. Of course, he would want to get involved and make sure if she was alright.

Still, and he couldn't say what it was, but none of this struck him as an accident. No...this seemed calculated...planned. A near-perfect mockery of an accidental meeting. But if that was the case, then what did it mean?

Light Yagami insisted on walking Naomi all the way here for her protection, which could fit in with him either being a good samaritan or a nosy kid. Both could make sense for the son of the police chief. He then left without coming inside, respecting his boundaries even if they were unstated. Objectively, there was nothing suspicious here, but his brain wouldn't leave it alone. His instincts had closed more cases than all of the evidence in a whole police station and there was something about this situation that just…

“Welcome. Please take a seat.” L greeted, whirling around in his chair and stuffing a bite of cake into his mouth. “It’s good to see you again, Naomi.”

“You as well, L.” She smiled with clear relief on her face. The other investigators made room for her and she settled down into her new seat.

It did seem she was happy to see him, but that made sense with how desperate she likely was to pass on the information she had on the Kira Case. After inviting her to explain and seeing what she had come up with, L could see why she thought the information was important enough that she could only tell it to him. It would change the entire investigation if it proved true since it could reveal additional victims that Kira might wish to stay hidden.

How Light Yagami fit into this, L didn't quite know yet, but it felt wrong to just chalk it up to meaningless coincidence. Light Yagami's behavior, from start to finish, was completely beyond reproach. One might even say he was *too* innocent.

Wouldn't someone that age show some personal interest in the investigation? Especially since his father was heavily involved? Even if they didn't want to be an officer, some amount of curiosity was normal. Yet, Light had shown none. It may have been easily missed by most due to the friendly nature of his actions, but his stance towards the investigation seemed perfectly indifferent. As much as he seemed to want to help Naomi, he didn't seem eager in any way for the actual investigation to be helped.

There was only so much data L could gather without meeting the boy personally, but he couldn't help but wonder if this apparent disinterest was genuine or feigned. Perhaps the boy thought to look more adult by pretending not to care or that it would invite their interest if he

didn't? Or maybe, L couldn't help but think, there was another reason he didn't want to seem too interested.

If Light was worried about looking too interested in the state of the Kira Investigation...could it be that there was a less innocent explanation for it? Was he looking too much into it?

"Naomi," L said, at last. "Would you be so kind as to tell me what you thought of Light Yagami?"

"Light Yagami?" Naomi looked up, surprised at the teenager being brought up. The surprise on her face faded as she thought for a moment, L waiting patiently. "Light proved himself to be a smart and perceptive boy, from the moment we met. He was open to my case and used his unique resources to help me." She said firmly, with a nod towards Soichiro Yagami as she mentioned this. The man showed no reaction besides a twinge of pride.

"More than that, he was kind," She continued. "He showed more concern for me than he needed to and he was unfailingly respectful."

L hummed as he took in that information, stirring his tea. That was reasonably generic information, it didn't tell him much about Light's motivations, although it might shine some light on Light's character.

If Naomi was correct in her observation, then there was nothing for L to reasonably be concerned about. A respectful and kind boy would have no need to avoid looking suspicious by feigning disinterest in the investigation. Yes, it would make sense for a respectful person to observe even unspoken boundaries and stay away. That could have been what happened here.

And yet, L found himself dissatisfied with this account. While he

trusted Naomi's judgment, there was something regarding this whole setup that nagged at him. Especially so if this boy was indeed perceptive and intelligent. Intelligence was something that often led one to get into trouble; L knew this from experience. It was not the habit of intelligent individuals to stay in their lane and not get involved with things.

"Mr. Yagami, how would you describe your son?" L found himself asking, looking for something that would either feed his suspicions or put them to rest. He dug his thumb into his lip.

"My son is a good kid." Soichiro Yagami said after a few seconds, looking at L oddly. He was used to that. "He's at the top of his class, gets excellent grades, and behaves himself. He does a good job of looking after the family when I'm not there, which is quite often." The older man said with noticeable guilt.

Once again, L found the information to be of little help. Even more generic than Naomi's, it did barely a thing more than tell L that the boy was good at pleasing his parents and verifying Naomi's observation about his intellect. The information, like before, should have put L's mind at ease and convinced him that Light Yagami was a perfectly forgettable teenager who was nothing particularly special.

So why did it feel like Light Yagami was too perfectly ordinary? It felt more akin to a cultivated mask than a true character assessment and it made him reluctantly intrigued even though he didn't know if it had anything to do with the Kira Investigation. Until now, L had not entertained the idea of informing the task force members that he had brought in the FBI to tail their family members.

Even if they had difficulty trusting him, he didn't think giving them that information would work strongly in his favor. They, the lot of them, were a highly emotional bunch. He doubted they would see the logic in it past their emotions.

One of the first things L had decided early on in their meeting was that the group was disappointingly dim, even as a collective. It wasn't that L had had his hopes up that any of them would be uniquely intelligent among law enforcement officers. It was just depressing how average they all were for their group, how much they were like the vast majority of officers out there. L had quite a bit of personal experience working with people in that particular field, he knew what the base average personality and intelligence was and it was dismal across the board.

That was as a group. As individuals, some were easily more irritating than others. At least in the case of Soichiro Yagami, he had a genuine belief in honor and endeavored to think things through, to not give in to emotion. He was obviously dedicated to his job. L found himself admiring it in his own way, even if he had no desire to emulate it.

Most of the others lacked even that minimal amount of credit. Aizawa, while clearly deferential towards his chief, was the loudest of the group. He often spoke at a high volume and took every opportunity to speak his - very obvious - opinion. Unfortunately, as was common to those types of individuals, he had nothing witty to say or of true substance. If anything, he was actively unhelpful, challenging him right from the beginning but not in a way that added anything to the investigation.

Mogi had yet to show a strong sense of personality unlike the other investigators, but he wasn't actively harmful to the investigation and at least initially appeared to be dedicated to the investigation. More would become apparent as time went on if he stuck around, even though the man was easily the most reserved of the group. Ukita was like a slightly more positive and less disrespectful version of Aizawa, but L could already tell that he was impulsive and impatient. That was going to be unpleasant to try and curb during the investigation.

The tier of mental dexterity came to a crash at rock bottom with Matsuda. How he was an investigator was astounding, both in how he

had been hired and why he even aimed for such a career. He really struck L as someone who would be more at home in a social setting with a far lower sense of severity. He was easily the least helpful of the group and would probably be relegated to getting them all coffee rather than doing anything *actually* helpful.

In truth, the group should be grateful that L had easily picked up on their overall unimpressive unintelligence. Even if he was meeting with them in person as his way of holding out the requested olive branch of partial trust to his temporary coworkers, one could never be too careful. Kira would surely be eager to learn more about the investigation and to meet L in person if he could, so L wanted to be reasonably convinced that Kira wasn't among them.

He was more than reasonably convinced.

He'd interviewed them individually and come away quickly from each one with the conviction that Kira could be neither so stupid nor so unimaginative. No, the person who called him out on live TV, using a criminal as a mouthpiece, was not among this group. He'd announced that deduction to the group at the conclusion of the interviews, cutting out the problematic aspects of his deduction that would have offended most of them and created problems. The group reacted with large smiles and relief, unaware of the insult he ultimately meant by that statement in a mildly entertaining way.

So it was only now that L began to consider informing them of what he was planning to do, using the FBI. He didn't trust them to add anything of use and doing so allowed them the possibility to intervene and make a nuisance of themselves. However, the passing of Light Yagami through L's periphery brought to the investigation...a point of interest. A brown-haired, golden-eyed point of interest.

Should L tell Chief Yagami that the detective could steadily feel his interest being piqued by his son's behavior or his lack of behavior? To do so would almost necessitate telling the group about his requesting

the FBI's presence. He decided he would take some more time to sit on the thought and make his final decision later.

Naomi was a breath of fresh air in the investigation, a much welcome one even if she was curiously supportive of Light Yagami. L had gotten to know her during the LA BB Murder Case and had been truly impressed by her by the end. Perhaps it had something to do with her being FBI, people who tended to be several cuts above the average officer which was why he had specifically requested *their* presence in Japan, but he knew that it was the fact that she had the rationale and the mind for possibilities that had allowed her to become one of the best in her field. They obviously hadn't kept in contact after the case, but L couldn't help but be pleased to see her here and getting involved in the Kira Case.

"Ms. Misora," L asked, curiously. "Is there any problem you have with providing your laptop so that we could investigate the sender of the message?" He was, of course, referring to the anonymous tip she admitted to having received that had given her the sensitive information that had ultimately brought her to him.

"I already referred it to a contact of mine," Naomi informed him, readily. "They couldn't find anything."

L hummed. He severely doubted that her contact would hold a candle to L's own resources. Most were laughable. "Still, if it's all the same, I'd prefer to have a go at it."

He was certain he could find something that would lead them to an individual, one who perhaps knew more about Kira. If they could find this person, they could be a potential ally. At worst, they would still have defined an unknown element, which was enough reason to go through with seeking them out on its own.

"Of course." Naomi nodded. "I hope you have better luck than I did."

"Hmm...I hope so, as well." L pondered. "Do you intend to get further involved in the case now that you're here?"

Naomi got an uncomfortable expression and looked down at her lap, before snapping her head back up as she realized how vulnerable that looked. In the world of law enforcement, image was everything. L knew this just as well as she did. You had to look strong or else you would appear weak.

"Well, you see the thing is that I'm not with the FBI anymore." She informed him, voice steady and back straight.

L's eyes widened slightly. "I wasn't aware of that fact. May I ask why that is?"

"I...have a fiance now." She answered, slowly. "I had quit my job so I could focus on the family we're going to have together."

"Then why did you get involved now with the Kira Case?" L inquired.

"It's as I said, I was contacted by an anonymous informant and I couldn't just ignore it." Naomi insisted.

"So do you intend to get further involved in the investigation?" L.

Naomi looked at him in surprise. "I…I hadn't thought about it." She admitted. "I'll be honest in saying that I hadn't really considered what

I would do after this. Would...would I be welcomed in the investigation?"

L hummed nonchalantly, taking a sip of his tea. "Of course. You were quite impressive in the case we worked together and I don't particularly mind that you no longer work with the FBI. You have perfectly enough qualifications for me."

"Oh...thank you." Naomi seemed flattered by his words. L didn't understand why, it was only the truth. She was perfectly qualified to be of assistance. "May I have time to think about it?" She asked him.

"Mm. Take as much time as you'd like. Watari will take you back to wherever you're staying to take possession of your laptop. He will make sure to let you know how to contact him before he leaves and you may do so at any time once you've made a decision on your involvement." L answered.

Naomi thanked him and bowed to them all before leaving with Watari, a thoughtful and troubled look on her face.

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Once everyone but Watari had left, L reviewed what he knew about Kira or at least what he suspected he knew.

Kira hated criminals, loathed them. If L had to guess, Kira probably saw criminals as scum. Kira's statement using Lind L. Tailor couldn't be relied upon to be completely genuine and likely wasn't. Though Kira used the opportunity to attack what L had chosen to do with Tailor, Kira had still killed him, implying that he didn't empathize with Tailor all that much. Otherwise, why not spare him? It was possible that Kira thought they were being truthful or they could just

have been lying through their teeth to make L seem like the bad guy in the situation.

Irritatingly, it worked. From online forums and interviews done by the news media, support for Kira seemed to have risen substantially. There was support for Kira from the beginning, people jumping on the bandwagon the moment it showed up, but the sharp jump in public support could only be a direct result of Kira's actions.

Clever. Kira was very clever. Not a mindless serial killer...no, they were nothing of the sort. They knew just how to make themself look good and make anyone attacking them look like public enemy number one. They did and said all of the right things to ensure people overlooked how evil his acts were. People had begun to see Kira as some kind of vigilante, on the side of good. Fighting for the public where the police and the justice system had failed.

...Maybe Kira saw themself like that, too. After all, that one particular murder that Naomi brought forward from her informant spoke to something of that nature. L had immediately looked it up on his computer and it did appear that Kira was now trying to solve cases in his own Kira-ish way. The member of organized crime that had died had immediately been recognized as a Kira victim.

However, the behavior they engaged in beforehand had not seemed strange enough to either the investigating officers or L to arouse their suspicions that Kira had controlled these actions. It frustrated L now that he could have missed something so obvious. The officer whose dirty dealings had been uncovered thanks to that incident had been prosecuted and public support for Kira had reacted to the news of a dirty cop by growing.

It made sense that Kira would want to take the cop down with the criminal in this way since it would feed both his ego and his public support. The most frustrating fact of all is that he chose to do it in a way that didn't harm the cop. The cop should have been a criminal in

his eyes and therefore fair game for a heart attack. Or, according to the new information that L had gotten from Naomi, then Kira could have had the officer die of another cause of death if they wanted to hide it. But no, Kira chose to out their crimes to law enforcement over hurting them, and even if none of the public or law enforcement knew of Kira's involvement in that, L knew.

And it *irked* him. Kira was removing any mistakes L could use against them by refusing to make them in the first place! Kira was winning.

Still, none of that changed that this was someone arrogant enough to act as judge, jury, and executioner. Under what authority do they have to do such a thing? It didn't matter, L would take pleasure in knocking them down several pegs. Still, there were several additional troubling pieces of information that he couldn't quite place yet.

Kira had known about Lind L. Tailor and perhaps even the entirety of L's plan regarding the man, which implied Kira had connections within law enforcement or was perhaps even an officer himself. Still, L had kept as few people as possible informed about what he had planned with Tailor, so the average lower-level officer wouldn't have known about it. No one on the Kira Task Force had, he'd made sure of it. If the leak had come from one of the few people who were informed before the Tailor Incident, it would narrow the field of suspects down significantly.

But could it really have been one of them? It seemed too simple, too straightforward. And perhaps exactly what Kira wanted him to do, going down the wrong path and chasing shadows while Kira was left to make plans against him.

The Kira Taskforce hadn't known about Tailor before Kira informed the *entire* Kanto region of it, but that didn't mean information wasn't being leaked from there. At least, before the mass exodus of officers. L trailed his fingers over the pin that lay on the table. The very reason he initially got in contact with the FBI to request their assistance. He

could still remember the shock and suspicion of that day when the pin had been found on the floor of the office being used exclusively for the Kira Investigation.

He still didn't know how it had gotten there besides, of course, someone having brought it in. L was almost certain that it hadn't been there before the meeting had started, meaning it was brought in sometime during or after. A Kira pin, one of the grotesque items being sold recently in response to the growing support the killer has received. L had been tangentially aware of these things but truly hadn't expected to find one within the boundaries of the police station. To think that someone would have been so brash as to bring that in...and so lucky that they could bring it, drop it, and still not be linked back to it. The offender was still undetected and they only had the one obvious conclusion to go on.

Someone in the Kira Investigation had been allied with Kira.

For all they knew, the officer was still keeping tabs on the police station for Kira, just from outside of the Investigation this time. L felt his blood boil at the thought. Someone in there was supporting the serial killer in one way or another, but that had been before most of the officers had left for one reason or another and the person responsible had likely been culled with the rest of the officers. L had felt sure that anyone working with Kira would refuse to leave and he would be able to find out who the most likely individual was, but he was absolutely certain that none of the remaining members were guilty of it. It confused him that Kira's supporter would have left. Surely, they would want to stick around and gather information…but L supposed that was only the case if they were in contact with Kira.

If they were simply an officer who was a supporter of Kira, not an informant, then they probably never wanted to be on the Kira case, to begin with, and would have been eager to leave. They wouldn't want to be part of the team trying to catch their liege if it served no purpose.

L was going to have to keep a close eye on this aspect of the investigation because none of it was making sense. Only a few individuals could have known about Tailor previously to him appearing on television, but none of those people had been part of the Kira Investigation and none of them fit the image of Kira that L had in his head, regardless.

The only person who L had met who he could even remotely conceive of being Kira was...

Chapter End Notes

> What we see clearly here is L interpreting Kira's actions through his own lens. As is often the case with him, L can often be biased with how he interprets the intention behind people's actions; Light's, in particular. But in L's defense, when someone is both intelligent and manipulative, it can be way too easy to attribute all of their words and actions to a selfish motive.
>
> Also, I won't do anything crazy, but I'm not gonna pressure myself to stay limited to the canonical limits in technology they had at the time. It feels like one of those things that could stand to be updated. So if L can rewind videos that he shouldn't be able to rewind or has better resolution than he should be able to get...well.

Recollections of a Future Past

Chapter Summary

Light thinks about a life and a man from a future past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ryuk hovered over Light's shoulder as Light ate his dinner. The family dinners were always stilted to the Shinigami and so it was always a tossup on whether or not Ryuk would stick around during it or just wait for Light up in their room. As for his opinion on the dinners, Light was used to them. He didn't use to think they were anything special back in his previous life, but he thought now that that might be rather the point.

There was nothing about their family dinners at all that was special or indeed even noticeable and that could very well be the root of the thing. Light had seen and even taken part in nights out, eating and drinking with coworkers. He'd seen other people do the same. Even during the time that he lived with Misa, the many dinners he'd had with her were different than at home. She was always chatting and excitedly talking about her day or asking Light about his. Of course, he didn't really draw any conclusions from this in his first life; he had already turned "Light Yagami" into a persona rather than a person and had lost that ability to look at himself objectively that he would have needed to do so.

Now though, things were different. He *felt* different. Family dinners felt different, for all that he was used to them and was able to take part in it without any external or internal discomfort.

In all honesty, Light didn't know exactly what made dinners with his family feel so different compared to his other past experiences. It wasn't that there was no conversation. Although there were more quiet moments during dinner than was comfortable, there was still a good amount of talking.

His mother would ask him and his sister about their days, Sayu would talk about school and her friends, and Light would answer simply with what he knew his mother wanted to hear. She would nod happily at whatever Light said and turn her attention to something else. Besides asking him the generic question about how his day was, she only ever asked him about school. Well, if one of her friends had mentioned their daughter to her recently, then she would try to work in a conversation about that. Maybe she would make a single comment or ask one more question about what he said, but then her attention would turn.

Light would try to remember what Sayu said about her day, but it felt like the same thing on repeat and he couldn't even empathize with what she was talking about the first time he heard it. It usually involved complaining about classes, talking about something she did with her friends (shopping or gossiping, almost invariably), and whining about boys. Light…

Light couldn't get it, not in a meaningful way. It wasn't Sayu's fault, either. They were just different. Light finished his dinner and got up from the table, collecting his plate and washing it in the sink before excusing himself to his room. He grabbed a piece of apple tart to go on his way up, listening to his sister teasing him about his recent sugar consumption on the way. Something about how he'll break out if he keeps eating sweets. He brushed it off.

Light closed and locked his bedroom door as he went in, holding the door open for Ryuk to come in before he did so. He sat at his desk and dug into his tart, letting Ryuk have a big bite when the other Shinigami hovered near him.

"Man, that was a boring dinner!" Ryuk whined after he'd eaten his bit, humming contentedly. He floated over to Light's bed and spread himself out on it, looking back at his friend. "How do you stand it?"

"Practice." Light answered, simply.

"But seriously!" Ryuk said. "If I have to listen to your sister go on about how hard her homework is one more time, I'm going to lose it!! She does know that it won't get any easier the more she complains about it, right?"

"Yeah," Light sighed. "But it's probably better to let her get it all out so she can actually do the work."

" *If* she does it," Ryuk said, but he couldn't argue against the work usually getting done. It was just usually put off until the last minute. "Say. I was wondering something as I listened to your family chat and I nearly forgot to ask about it! Why doesn't your mom ask Sayu about her schoolwork like she does with you?" The Shinigami cocked his head.

Light turned to look at him. "She asked Sayu if she finished her homework." Light pointed out.

"But that was it." Ryuk elaborated. "She tried to talk with you for seven minutes about school, but with Sayu, she barely touched on it. Your sister even answered the question by saying that she hadn't finished her work and your mom basically left it at that! I'm still not an expert on humans, but I'm pretty sure that she should've realized at that point which child she should be discussing school with."

Light looked at him for a few seconds before sighing. "I don't know what to tell you. I don't always understand why my parents do the things they do, either. It just is what it is, on that front." He answered.

"Has it always been like that?" Ryuk asked, going over his own memories of Light's past life, only to find that he couldn't remember

much because he didn't pay attention to that kind of thing the first time around.

"For as long as I can remember." Light answered, leaning his chin on his palm. He turned over a piece of tart in his hand. "With me, it was always about school, and with Sayu, it was about everything else."

"And you don't see anything wrong with that?" It was a question, but Ryuk's tone of voice said he already suspected the answer he was going to get.

"It's…" Light started but cut himself off with another sigh. "Of course I do." He admitted. "But that's the way things are done here and they wouldn't understand what my problem was if I brought it up. I'm the oldest child, the son, it's my job to be successful. Any success Sayu finds in school is an unnecessary accomplishment. For me, it's a given, it's expected. Her job is to be the younger child, the girl. As long as she doesn't become a wild child, she can more or less do whatever she wants. All of the responsibility falls to me, anyway."

Ryuk peered at him in sorrow. "Is that how you felt before?"

Light smiled, his sadness shining through. "I took it for granted that that was the way it had to be, before. I was never really encouraged to take inspiration for how to live my life from outside sources. My parents were always the type that felt that whatever morals and values their children needed to know would be learned at home. We were always treated differently because our roles had been decided the moment we were born. Sayu seems happy with hers, but I think mine choked me. Stunted my growth and made it harder for me to branch out and *try* things." He informed his friend.

He thought for a moment before continuing on. "I think that's a part of the reason that I have a hard time connecting with my sister. I'm sure

we're just naturally different people, to some extent. There's probably a lot of siblings out there that can't understand each other, but…" Light let out a slow breath. "But I do think there's more to it than just that. After all, how can I possibly empathize with her incessant need to complain about her work or how difficult it is or having to go to school, at all? I'm great at learning and memorizing, but I'm this way because I worked hard for it and I did that because I was never given the *choice* to do otherwise. She *gets* to complain about school and homework, but I would have been scolded by our parents even as a little kid if I had done the same. Maybe told to work harder. Either way, it wouldn't have been tolerated or treated with much empathy, even by mom, if I had tried to gripe even half as much as Sayu does. Does that make sense?" He asked Ryuk.

Ryuk rather thought it did. It was a gross double standard, the Shinigami realized. One the sister didn't see (as well as the parents) and one Light only saw because he had the extra years of maturity and experience. It was a large reason why the two siblings couldn't connect well, it appeared.

"Maybe I'm just smart, but I always put in so much effort into school, too. I'm not trying to say that I think Sayu doesn't put in any work towards school, but it's obvious watching her that she doesn't take it all that seriously. And why should she? No one else does. She doesn't go to after school study like I always did, no matter how high my grades were. She goes out with friends or comes home and watches TV. She was always encouraged to ask for help with her schoolwork whereas I was pressured into finding the answers myself, reading through textbook after textbook to find them. She's average at it so she'll probably get a decent job and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, in principle. Not everyone has to like or be good at school or even get a high-paying job, whatever our parent's beliefs are. Maybe our parents don't fully expect her to get a job. After all, our mom is a housewife and she acts the way the Japanese ideal of a wife should and my education is treated more seriously partially because I'm a boy, so maybe that's it." Light's gaze was somewhere a little bit further away than the room.

He was looking into his own past, in a way. Going through every

memory and every interaction that came to mind. He and his sister as little kids, among other times. Even back then, Light knew they were treated differently, but it would be a while before he realized that it wasn't just because he was the older one. Light couldn't decide if his family was abnormal or if they were *too* normal. The demure housewife, the absent and authoritative father, the bubbly and impetuous little sister, and the responsible and overachieving older brother.

Before in his previous life, all Light would have been able to say about his family if pressed was that it was normal. Completely, unassailably normal. He had more to say about it now. In a lot of ways, Light felt they were the ideal of the perfect family, especially in Japan. Maybe there was a reason why most families never completely achieved this ideal...it was not meant to be met. A dream is just that, a dream.

The moment people begin twisting and bending themselves to meet a trivial ideal - or worse, twisting someone else - mental and emotional health begins to deteriorate significantly. He wondered if they were indeed twisting and bending themselves or if they fell into their roles naturally. Maybe his father really had always felt more comfortable working than being with his family. More in his element. Maybe his mother had always wanted to be the ruler of a household and family and nothing else. More manageable than maintaining a job.

Maybe they were both just happy as they were and had always been...maybe Sayu was happy. Light couldn't say and despite them being his family, he didn't feel close enough to them to ask. All Light could say was how he felt. He wasn't happy. Not with the role he'd been placed into in his family, at least. Probably never had been. Maybe he'd taken a perverse pride in being put on a pedestal, but that was poisonous more than anything else.

Light shook the thoughts from his head as Ryuk replied. "That's real messed up." The Shinigami muttered in irritation. He didn't particularly care about what humans did or didn't do. Generally speaking, human suffering was pure entertainment for him and at best, he was indifferent to it. What did anger him was what he could

clearly see that it had done to *Light* .

Ryuk had watched Light do so much growing up over time, but he realized seeing Light like this that things from the past could and did still hurt him. His dear friend might have grown past it, but they still happened. Well, at least Light had him now and Ryuk had no interest in pressuring Light to do anything. He could be himself in the realm of this room.

"Soooooo," Ryuk started, dragging the word out. "What do you thinks gonna happen with Raye Penber and the FBI investigation?" He was trying to distract Light from the depressing conversation, but he was also interested in the answer.

The best thing about Light's plans was that they weren't always clear where they were going. Maybe Light-o wasn't even planning for it at all and was just going to wait to see what happened and let the chips fall where they may. He did that sometimes.

Light blinked at the change in discussion topic before his expression cleared. "Well…" Light hummed. "I imagine it'll go just as it did before. Except, of course, for that stunt I pulled with the bus. Maybe something will change that, but we won't know until it happens." Light smiled.

Ryuk considered that. "Do you think your efforts to work ahead in your Note is going to be wasted? You know, if your boyfriend doesn't put in the cameras the way he did before?"

Light let out a soft laugh at the ridiculousness of the idea that his effort was wasted. "I sincerely doubt that. I don't think I've done anything that would change *that* . Honestly, I doubt there's much I *could* do to change that particular event." He confided.

"Why's that?" Ryuk inquired, interested. He floated off of the bed and hovered above it upside down.

"Well, it wasn't Raye's death that made him load my room up with cameras, trying to catch me doing something. Not really. It was L's interest that had piqued during the routine surveillance he was doing on all the families. As long as I still have that, he'll put the cameras in my room again. Maybe not at the same time as before, but the tipping point will have to be somewhere. Someone with that much unrestrained curiosity, matched by equally unrestricted power, wouldn't be able to let it go."

Light smiled, a vague tinge of fondness to it as he spoke of L's antics. "It's for that reason I'm confident that even if he, for some strange reason, decides to do something other than putting the cameras in my room, he'll still do something. He won't forget about me. It would be disappointing, sure, if he doesn't put me under complete surveillance like he did last time. It would be great to have deaths continue like nothing happened and I take a break while L scrutinizes everything! Very fun." Light gave a soft laugh. "But you win some, you lose some. Besides, L never truly disappoints me." Light smiled widely at the ceiling.

Light crossed his arms behind his head in contentment. "Maybe he'll put me in prison again or chain himself to me. Who knows? Maybe he'll just stalk me and make a note of what news media I consume? We'll have to wait and see and, of course, react." His smile turned into a devious smirk at those last words.

Met with a matching one from Ryuk.

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Maybe it was all that talk about the past, but Light found himself thinking about it more as he lay in his bed that night. This time, however, his thoughts had turned towards the much more pleasant direction that he tended towards often.

L.

The perplexing man that had captivated him for what felt like forever now. Instead of focusing on his feelings for the man this time as something else occurred to him and captured his thoughts. Casting his mind back to all he'd seen of L, he couldn't help but wonder while lying there if there wasn't more to think about when it came to the strange habits L had always displayed.

Back when they had first met, L had represented a deviation from what was normal with his odd habits and was an annoyance as a result. At least, to the version of Light who detested anything that was beyond the limit of what he was raised with.

After he found out that L was who he was and the man continued to make a nuisance of himself, Light more or less ignored his eccentricities to focus on the issues at hand. The bastard was making his life difficult and that was more important to him at the moment than how many sugar cubes he was currently trying to fit into his teacup.

When Light lost his memories of being Kira, his perspective on a lot of things changed. Or reverted, depending on how one wanted to look at it. Having gotten over the initial puzzlement of L’s quirks, Light found himself unknowingly and irritatingly charmed by them. There was something that was - dare he say - cute about L’s antics...when he wasn’t in the process of being a dick to him and generally everyone else, anyway.

L's ritual of standing on chairs was especially adorable when the chair had wheels and he would glide around the room instead of getting up. Light felt fondness at the memory of L pouring ungodly amounts of sugar cubes into his tea and the leaning tower of sugar cubes he made on his desk was endearingly childlike from such a jaded man. Even L's special brand of unrelenting assholery had grown on him and Light had come around to it. In the way that one came to accept the annoying flaws of the people that they love, mind. Not in the way that Light ever learned not to be annoyed by it.

So saying, Light had transitioned through a lot of different feelings regarding L's L-ness, but he'd never really thought about the behaviors themselves. A mistake, he now realized. One he was correcting now as he was sure that he had overlooked them too much. It wasn't like he thought there was anything *wrong* with L...the man was who he was and there was nothing wrong with being different even if he came off as strange because of it. It was just...Light wanted to understand L and maybe there was no understanding it and there really was no reason for anything, but he didn't think just ignoring his habits, even if Light thought many of them were cute, was the best way of going about it.

L had a deficiency of people who understood and accepted him.

It was these thoughts that propelled Light up from his bed and he ignored Ryuk's startled questioning as he settled down in the seat at his desk, turning on his computer. Beyond the initial reasoning, Light couldn't say what he was doing, exactly. What he was looking for or what he was hoping to find or achieve. He was just...curious about it. Light pulled up a search engine and after a brief moment of thought where he wracked his mind for something that would work as a search. Leaning towers of sugar cubes wouldn't bring up anything helpful if he searched it, but maybe the standing on the chair thing? L did say that he *had* to sit like that and that it reduced his mental abilities when he sat normally.

Nothing helpful from that either, as it turned out. Just some pictures of the act and some articles about how dangerous standing on your chair was. No scientific evidence of the claim L had made so far back

now about how it helped him think better. There was also a lack of other people taking part in the ritual or he just didn't find them if there were others. Light tried, again and again, running through whatever behaviors of L's he could remember that sounded like they could produce something.

It felt like a very long time before any of his searches turned up something good, but the clock on his computer told him it was barely more than ten minutes. Regardless, he finally got something. It was when Light decided to use L's peculiar way of speaking in his search that he hit paydirt. In particular, Light was looking into the change in L's cadence or tone of voice when speaking or the lack thereof, as it were. One of the most distinctive things Light felt that people immediately noticed and were bothered about with L, besides his appearance, was the way his voice rarely changed, no matter what he was saying or what he was talking about.

His voice did change *some* , Light noticed, but it really was something that you had to spend a lot of time around the man and listening to him (as Light did on both counts, he was happy to say) in order to pick up. Actually, Light prided himself on being one of the few individuals who could immediately pick out that note of annoyance in L's voice when he finds himself irritated by something but won't say it. The smallest, barely-there hints of amusement in his tone were equally easy to miss if you didn't know what his voice sounded like normally.

Light had never before and never again ran into someone who had such difficulty (or was it just disinterest?) in having their voice change with their emotions. In fact, people usually had the opposite problem and couldn't keep their feelings out of their voices if their lives depended on it. It was something that most people did without thinking and the fact that L didn't was very off-putting to a lot of people. There were plenty of people who had trouble putting their thoughts into words, but that was a different difficulty entirely. Anyways, it had the unfortunate side effect of making people think L had no feelings or emotions, but Light knew definitively how untrue that was.

Because he *did* hear the slight rise of annoyance in L's voice when he was faced with the likes of Matsuda or Misa. Because Light had seen the excitement in L's movements when they hit a break in the case. Because...Light remembered the look in L's eyes as the older man stared at him later in the investigation when he thought the teenager wasn't looking. The looks that he caught out of the corner of his eye.

L had just as many feelings as anyone else, he just didn't show it as easily or in the ways that people were used to.

What the internet search pulled up, however, was surprising. A lot of hits. That matched Light's recollections exactly. So many that Light wondered what was up until he started reading. He was surprised by what he found, but he couldn't say why exactly. Maybe it was some vestiges of his childhood being raised to a cookie-cutter lifestyle that it didn't occur to him for a second before now. He was never raised to have people with different needs or things of that nature in mind and it never became truly relevant to him later in life.

People with disabilities or neurological disorders or things of that nature. He never gave it any thought and maybe that was the more damaging thing, as it usually was. He never considered that L could simply (insofar as things of that nature *could* be simple) have a disorder or something along that vein.

Apparently, difficulty moderating one's tone and voice was a characteristic of autism, one of many. And it made so much sense as Light read. The social difficulty, fixation on facts and information, hang-ups with routines or rituals...this was all sounding achingly familiar. Light began searching specific traits he could think of that L displayed and adding autism to them in his search.

The more he found, the more it really sounded like L was somewhere on the autism spectrum. He found something in particular that struck him as very L-ish. It was something to the effect of "people tend to speak less but their words also tend to be of a higher quality". Which

basically summed up how L spoke. He seemed more comfortable in the quiet or listening to others talk, gathering information, but he spoke at a high level and still likely got out only a fraction of his thoughts. Socialization was difficult for people with autism and took a bigger toll on them mentally than just thinking did. And it showed in how amazing L was at analysis and crime-solving but had significantly less success in the social sphere.

Even L's tone issues were accounted for by being autistic and the syndrome added new information that Light hadn't considered. Light knew that L didn't like wearing shoes, for instance, or at least chose not to do it often. His research informed him that it might be a sensory thing, as it was easy for those with autism to get sensory overload or to be easily bothered by certain sensations or textures and the feet could be particularly sensitive to this.

Of course, like all things in this area, it was highly subjective and varied widely among individuals. Still, it got Light thinking about whether or not that had been L's issue with wearing shoes. Maybe wearing shoes was a mixture of genuinely uncomfortable sensations and he tried to avoid it whenever possible for that reason.

Light leaned back in his chair and went over all of the information he'd gotten. It didn't change how he felt about L, not in the slightest, but it did grant him some more clarity about why L acted so differently in so many of his actions. In some very important ways, he *was* different and it would have taken constant and active effort to contort himself into acting the way the people around him did and Light already knew that L wouldn't have thought that to be important. After all, why should he act in any other way than what made him comfortable?

Light smiled fondly at the thought. Indeed, why should he? Other people might not want to put in the effort of understanding or accepting L for who he was, but Light always would. He just understood L slightly better now.

Chapter End Notes

So how's that? When it comes to the tag about L's autism, I didn't want it to be lampshaded; something that existed in the tags only but didn't affect the story in any way. There's nothing wrong with L because he's autistic, but I don't feel like it should be waved off as nothing important. I don't want to act like it has no impact on his life whatsoever, because things don't work like that. People's personalities and behaviors affect things like relationships and story, so I never wanted it to be something that wasn't tackled. So! At the risk of handling one difficult subject matter after another, I'm throwing my hat in the ring with this! In the name of diversity and representation!!

Your Move, Love

Chapter Summary

I gave Light a smartphone. I'm not sorry.

Chapter Notes

So many scene transitions in this one...I counted no less than four.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raye Penbar was following him now.

Ryuk noticed the moment the man started tailing them and immediately alerted Light to the non-issue. Light battled to keep a smile off of his face as he heard the good news. He didn't think that his meddling with the man's fiance and with L would change this man's job and the whole reason for him being in Japan in the first place, but he still worried a little. The tiniest flaw in a plan, after all, could have unforeseen consequences. Light was intimately familiar with how one's plans to move something forward could accidentally end up moving it back instead or even worse, how one's attempts to avoid an event could end up being the thing that causes the event to happen.

Thankfully, though, that did not seem to be the case this time and Light could breathe a sigh of relief about it. As he'd told Ryuk, it's not like his plans to get into L's life all hinged on that one little thing; he would have to be supremely disadvantaged or just an utter fool for that to be the case. Light was lucky enough to be in love with a man who was more determined than a bull and because of that, as long as Light can get on his radar, L will come. It was just that Raye made things easier.

Not because Raye noticed anything about Light that would throw up red flags, but that was rather the point. Mr. Penbar was not incompetent. All in all, he seemed rather good at his job from what Light had seen in his previous life, but he was not an actual genius

and L was paranoid. No, it was more than that. One could also say that L saw shadows everywhere or that he hated taking things at face value and those would both be correct too, but it didn't encapsulate all of what made L such a good detective compared to these perfectly serviceable FBI agents that he had investigating.

L was distrustful of other people, incredibly so. He was possessed of the belief that humans were naturally deceptive beings and as such, he could never trust that they were being truthful at any given time. The usual fallacy of using the known fact that people could be a certain way, to make the leap of saying they could always be like that. Light personally felt that L thought this way because L himself was such a liar.

At any rate, far from taking things at face value, L analysed everything and everyone and if he found anything that set him off, he'd investigate them until either he loses his mind or they do and, really, it's usually them. As long as something set L off, he'd chase the subject down and that was what made Light confident that nothing would distract L completely from him if Light had succeeded in getting his attention. One thing that Light had found especially striking at the time that he had heard it in his past life was that even not seeing something worrying in someone's behavior was enough to set L off. Something they *weren't* doing.

Really, what it came down to was whether the person was acting as L thought they should be. L would leave some people alone but badger others seemingly without clear reason, but in the end, it was always about what was going on in L's mind. Less than the person's own behavior, whether or not L would take a strong interest in someone was always down to his own interpretation of how this particular person should be behaving and whether or not they violated it. Light had incorporated that observation into his scheme to pique L's interest when he'd brought Naomi Misora to him.

Light put himself in L's way by doing that, forcing the man to notice him, but the thing that would be most likely to make him stay in the man's notice is how innocent he acted. In the future past, L had

thought that Light shouldn't be so innocent, so above reproach, and that incited his interest. Hopefully, it would do so again. Whether it was Light himself, his age, or something else, L was of the firm opinion that innocence did not become Light and so the more virtuous he acted (and the more virtuous other people perceived him to be), the more upset L should get.

As long as that one line of planning worked out, then Light wouldn't have to go to extremes to get the man to look at him. Probably better for everyone involved, that.

So saying, he didn't really *need* Mr. Penbar, but he could still use him, which was why Light was happy the man was following him. Despite what Ryuk had been hoping for, Light wasn't going to do a damn thing with Penbar watching; he didn't need to. He'd written ahead *plenty* of names into his Death Note, making sure that all of them deserved to be there. It was the product of a constant effort over a long period of time, instead of the crazy binge of random names that it would've been in his past life.

Really, Light benefitted from having the names written ahead in his note on multiple levels. He still hoped that L would go through with the massive surveillance, but even still, he didn't have to think about writing in his note or having Ryuk do it and doing research all while Penbar is stalking him because of the names he'd written. If he had an accident or was imprisoned like he was last time, same difference.

A benefit of not going on a killing rampage was that he didn't kill in the kind of proportions he used to and that he didn't have any kind of routine or schedule for when he writes them down when he feels comfortable making a decision on a name is when he writes it down and that varies wildly. Those two things meant that the names he wrote ahead in his Note stretched well into the future...he had *years* worth of names written down. Then again, that wasn't hard when he didn't kill every day or even every week, at times. He tried to keep his inconsistent schedule when writing names ahead, so L wouldn't have a hint of anything different, should it come to that.

Ryuk had wanted Light to pull something with Raye, something that would be entertaining. Not killing him, obviously, but to have some fun. Light vetoed that, though. He figured the normalcy of Light's life that Raye would report back would be enough to bother L and it wasn't like any of the FBI investigators would find anything any more worthwhile if they were to live, unlike last time. Maybe, by some chance, someone they were set to investigate would be a criminal or doing something illegal, but they won't find Kira. L will be forced, like he had been before, to look more into the situation himself, especially if he feels certain that Kira is actually one of these people that are being investigated and is just lying low. He'll be forced by circumstance to look more into Light.

Light wasn't going to do anything to make himself look suspicious during this particular stakeout, which was why his next little order of business would be done once he was inside his school.

~ ❶ ~

Light's main center of operation was his home and, in particular, his bedroom, but he did occasionally deem his school an appropriate place to work on certain things.

Light could do any work using his phone in the hallways or other social areas and then do anything that involves writing on paper in the classrooms. Light always had the preternatural ability to pay enough attention to what people were talking about around him and respond to it even while he was mostly daydreaming or scheming. He could get lost in his own head and still be able to respond to the teacher in class. When Light was on his phone outside of class, he was working on his new passion project; creating an even larger fanbase for Kira.

Light knew as well as anyone these days that people could be insane

lunatics. He himself was one near the end of his life. Kira attracted posers and fanatics alike, people who jumped on a bandwagon to justify their own egregious acts or who wanted something bigger than them to believe in so much that they would overlook their idol's behavior no matter how terrible it gets and climb over themselves to blame the victims of those behaviors. Light was no longer under the delusions that: a) People who support Kira were necessarily good people, and b) That good people would always support Kira.

However, the way Light now saw it, those people were going to act that way, anyway. Maybe having an idol or a law or majority support would increase it, but there will always be people who will act this way and do terrible things without cause. Despite what he'd previously thought, you cannot clean up the world. Light was doing this now because he could save some lives this way and it was in his blood now. He *was* Kira.

But he didn't have a savior complex anymore. Maybe Light was wrong and he would love to be that, where this was concerned, but he thought that humanity couldn't have true peace as long as it existed. If you wanted that uncompromisingly, then you had to wipe out humanity. A shinigami's point of view tended to be depressingly realistic at times, however it had its benefits. It allowed him to go online to pump up Kira without feeling like he was creating those maniacs.

Using his time in-between classes during school, Light created a Kira Fansite that L would be unlikely to be able to prove was him. The idea for it was a stroke of genius and the end result was a thing of beauty. It was easy to use but not offensively simple and it had an ivory and black color scheme. The color scheme was mostly the product of him not wanting to pander to either of the crazies he knew Kira would attract, the people who saw Kira as a perfect being or the ones that just wanted to run crazy. He figured ivory would be too pure and godly and mostly black would be too edgy (or trying to be, at any rate) and he really couldn't see a website with colors like purple or blue, so he combined the two.

He smiled at how the whole site looked, but what was written on it was better. The whole genius of the idea was what it was used for, spreading Kira's "beliefs". A person could go on there and find out anything they would want to know about Kira without relying on hearsay to get information. More to the point, its existence would piss off anyone in a position of power, and - he was hoping - L. Light couldn't wait until someone got his website taken down so he could put it right back up again!

~ ❹ ~

L was incredibly dissatisfied. No, that felt like an understatement. He couldn't say what he was expecting, he shouldn't have reasonably been expecting anything, but he didn't get whatever it was and it was putting him into a funk.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing from any of the agents sent to investigate the families. Evidently, none of the agents thought the individuals under their care were suspicious and in most of those cases, L would have been inclined to agree. In fact, he'd done preliminary research into each person who would be under surveillance and none of them struck him as more than ordinary and he'd be hard-pressed to consider them as Kira potential. There was, however, one exception and that was the source of his current discontent.

In point of fact, Light Yagami had come out of nowhere. He'd inserted himself into L's realm of the investigation and then wisped away just as quickly, but L couldn't seem to forget about the almost encounter. Light was the only individual among those being investigated that L had been hopeful for. From his research, Light Yagami was intelligent and he suspected he was cunning, as well. Light's very demeanor seemed to draw L's attention, for reasons he couldn't identify. He was frustrated that Naomi's fiance didn't seem to think the same.

In truth, L had no true reason for suspecting Light of...something. There were no red flags in Light's behavior that said that he was

someone dangerous. There was his seeming lack of social ties, which may indicate an antisocial personality disorder of some kind, but nothing that could be deemed even relatively conclusive.

Light seemed perfect in every respect. He was an intelligent, well-mannered, high-achieving teenager who seemed close to his family and was following in his father's footsteps well.

Maybe that's the problem, L mused as he picked up a strawberry and stuck it into his mouth. *A perfect child like that doesn't exist.* There had to be something *wrong* with Light Yagami, there just had to be, and normally L would consider more mundane faults like dirty magazines or smoking behind his school, but the timing of Light showing up seemed far too coincidental. It begged for him to take a more serious view of what Light might be hiding.

Could it really be coincidence that Light just happened to be in the center of the Investigation in such an incidental way and then disappear from it? Even as he asked himself that, he already knew the answer. It wasn't impossible, but he really couldn't reconcile it being happenstance. What did that mean, then? Was there any possible way that Light could have engineered it? And if so, for what purpose?

L clicked through the report that had been emailed to him on Light Yagami. Again. Agent Penbar was very organized in both his observations and the structure of his report, L noted. He did seem to be very good at his job and L could see why he had been one of the agents sent by the FBI. The only thing that disappointed L was the lack of suspicion the report ultimately pointed towards the young Yagami.

Agent Penbar made note of all of Light’s interactions, habits, and trips. The boy’s schedule was well-documented and rarely differed. In the end, the agent had concluded that Light was a relatively ordinary boy and besides being diligent in his studies, there was nothing interesting about him. L bit his nail in frustration as he scowled at that particular

line. There was no damn way that could be true. It wasn't that he thought the agent incompetent, but there was only so much you could learn about a person by following them between their school and home. So much happened where you wouldn't be able to see, especially if the person was clever at hiding.

And Kira *was* .

There was one part of the agent's report, near the end, that got L's brain churning faster. It was a small comment. Innocuous, really. The agent didn't give it any particular importance and seemed to tack it on at the end without a thought. The words "he spends almost all of his time at home in his room" sat on the screen, looking back at him.

What could be made of that? Well, L had no answers, but he certainly had questions. What was the boy doing in his room all day every day? Was he just being a sulky teenager, trying to get distance from his family? Nothing about his behavior suggested that, though, and certainly, none of his conversations with the elder Yagami did. Although, he supposed, as honest as Yagami appeared, he might feel the desire to smooth over any flaws he sees in his son in a business setting, to give off the best impression of his family.

….L wasn't satisfied, not in the slightest. He couldn't accept it and now he had the enticing information that Light spent quite a large amount of his non-school hours closed up in his room. He felt closer to something than before, but not close enough. Like a fly on the wall of an outer chamber, he was close enough to get the hints of something that beckoned him to get closer and yet nothing definitive. Little bits of information that created an itch in his brain to know more.

He might be rushing to conclusions, it might be too early to say that Light Yagami is Kira. He truly didn't know if that was the case or not.

What he did know was that this teenager was the closest he had gotten so far to a viable suspect and said teenager just happened to slip into the realm of the investigation as none of the other people being investigated had.

L had always liked a challenge, it was the reason he'd gone after Kira in the first place. Light Yagami, similarly, was presenting a challenge. Was he just an ordinary high school student who happened to be unlucky enough to look like a suspect or was he something else? L *needed* to know. He needed more information and for that, he needed to set up more surveillance. He would have to decide his next step in that direction, because…

Because Light Yagami…

…was interesting.

~ ❶ ~

Light didn't immediately notice when Raye stopped following him, partly because he was ignoring the man and partly because he'd slid back easily into the habit of refraining from doing anything suspicious in public spaces. Ryuk had to be the one who pointed out his lack of a tail, which Light was grateful for, but it wasn't like it changed anything.

What was Light going to do that was dangerous in-between his house and his school that would scream *Kira* to someone besides L? And really, after a certain point, *breathing* would make L think he was Kira. All the better, he supposed.

Anyway, since nothing had happened during the following stint, Light had to conclude that Raye hadn't seen anything suspicious and had

ended the surveillance after that. He could have Ryuk check out L's side of the investigation later to see what the results of that would be. He didn't need to think about it any more than that, he decided and turned his mind to other things.

Something was also distracting him a little, which was why he maybe didn't realize that Raye had dipped out. It wasn't something he was doing, more something he was feeling. It had been going on since a few days after Agent Penbar started following him and it really was starting to bug him. Light felt sure that he was forgetting something. For the life of him, he couldn't guess at *what* , but he'd been getting the intense feeling lately that he'd forgotten something.

At first, Light thought that it was some small chore, something unimportant that he would either remember soon or forget about entirely, but the feeling persisted over a large amount of time without Light getting any closer to remembering what it was.

Light began to use his free time to try and remember whatever he was forgetting. He would talk about it with Ryuk in his room and wonder about it on his way to and from school and get no closer to an answer, to scratching that persistent itch in the back of his mind. He was determined to figure it out, eventually.

~ ❶ ~

Light dropped his pencil in class as his whole body froze, not even noticing his teacher asking him in a confused manner if he was going to pick it up. Light's golden eyes stared forward towards the front of the classroom, unseeing. Only one thing going through his head:

I forgot about Misa.

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking we haven't seen enough of Naomi lately. Next chapter should deal with that little problem. Also! Light was a master of control and managed to completely ignore Raye throughout his entire surveillance, but this isn't going to be the end of the issue, because I have a fun idea...

Dealing With It

Chapter Summary

Some things are decided.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Light...didn't like Misa. He really, *really* didn't. There had been a brief moment - upon remembering her - where he entertained guilt about how he had treated her, but the more he thought about it, the less he felt towards her at all. To him, she was the woman who'd forced him into being in a relationship and nearly got him killed with her incompetence on several occasions.

Light wasn't interested in pretending that his behavior towards her (as it had been with everyone else) wasn't abhorrent, but unlike many others, he wasn't willing to think that her behavior made her deserve any better from him. He'd treated many people badly who deserved better, but he found it difficult - incredibly difficult - to believe she was one of them. After all, the way she'd behaved herself was…it defied words, at many times. She'd treated him like a God, that was true, but that absolute worship hid the truly disturbing things she did to him.

Not only did she insert herself into his life, completely unbidden, but she came to his house when his family was there and lied to get in. A stranger…just showing up at your house when you're with your family. The fact that she thought that was okay was the tamest of the red flags that would shoot up. Light found himself drawn in by the idea of being able to use Misa and her Shinigami to help him in his mission, but that didn't change the fact that he was disinterested in doing even that at the beginning of their conversation.

It wasn't…it wasn't as if he'd leapt on her and Rem immediately. Rather, he'd tried to turn her away and talk her out of it at first. As usual, he was hesitant around an unknown element and so he didn't

simply kick her out, but that was what he was trying to do. But the threat was made clear soon. Rem wouldn't allow anything that made Misa unhappy and if Light didn't date her, he would become one of those things. Maybe even Misa might not be able to stop Rem from killing him then…or worse.

Considering Misa herself quickly threatened to kill any innocent girls she saw him with (clearly not caring if Light himself cared about them), he realized that he could be forced to be with Misa one way or another with Rem's help…so he decided to do it on his terms. He'd always felt the need in that life to have power and control, so the idea of having it taken from him in such a way alarmed him in a way that he wasn't able to assess at the time. Misa wouldn't be reasoned with, either. She was desperate.

The way she treated people's lives like they didn't matter in the slightest was truly sickening, considering her story about how her parents were killed. It wasn't even all at Light's bidding. The worst abuses of life she committed were completely of her own volition. Before she showed up in front of Light, under the guise of the Second Kira, she killed off innocuous members of the media who had never done anything to anybody just to prove she could kill people.

Light himself never dealt with tragedy the way Misa did so maybe he shouldn't speak about it, but one would think Misa would be extra sympathetic to hurting people, seeing how she was hurt in such a similar way. Instead, she killed police officers for the same reason as the media, just to prove a point. None of these people mattered to her and she thus showed herself to be just as bad as - if not worse than - the person who killed her family. That level of selfishness had no excuse, no good reason if she thought the person who killed her parents deserved to be punished. Either she believed killing innocent people was wrong or she didn't. In fact, Misa's hypocrisy was uniquely horrifying when considering her past experiences and what she would go on to do. Everyone could be hypocritical sometimes (Light especially thought he'd been), but not all people were victims of violent stalkers and then turned around and proceeded to violently stalk someone. Normally, people do not have terrible experiences with being the victims of a crime and then completely excuse in their heads

committing that same crime on other people. But then, he supposed, such was humanity. Humans were strange like that.

Funnily enough, her death threat wasn't even the scariest thing that she'd said to him, in his mind. No, that title went to when she said that she could make him love her. That…said a lot. Both, how she viewed relationships and how she viewed him. Maybe Light was looking too much into it but remembering that line and everything she had ever said or done, he felt like he appeared to her like some kind of doll.

A doll…something that could be manipulated and moved. Something without strong feelings of its own. Misa…always acted like if he felt something or did something she didn't like, it was her fault. On someone else, that would look self-deprecating, but it might have said something else. In her way, she was denying him his own will in a very insidious way. If she told herself that everything he did or didn't do was in reaction to herself, she deprived Light of his own reasoning and beliefs. She could allow herself to think that if she did this or that, she could change big things about him as if he wasn't his own person but just a living reaction to her.

Again, maybe he was looking too much into it, he told himself. Still, he couldn't help that creeping feeling in his flesh as he thought about their previous relationship, that feeling of someone trying to write over him. From beginning to end, Misa treated him like he could be changed to suit her needs. She wanted someone to take care of her and she'd decided that was Kira and then that it was Light himself. She wanted to be taken care of and she did what he told her to because she wanted to get that care. Just another person who put their stresses onto him, only her way of doing so was far more toxic than his family's had ever been.

In the end, with how Light was back then, the two of them had deserved each other. Light, with his selfish user behavior and then ignoring her when noticing her was inconvenient, and Misa, with her violent possessiveness that threatened to destroy him in her quest to have him. The two of them were terrible and they would only have

destroyed their partner if they had been with anyone else besides the other.

But things were different now. Light could ponder Misa's psychology and deduce why she made him as viscerally uncomfortable as she now did, but that wouldn't change the situation. Light had changed so much from who he had once been and if Misa had been a chore for him before, then the idea of being with her now was truly sickening. He loved L more than anything and if Misa were to try being his girlfriend again, she might see him as a threat if she found out about it. Even without her Death Note–

Light froze. "Ryuk!" Light cried out, whirling on his heel to face his bed, where his friend had been hovering and watching him.

At his cry, Ryuk wobbled unsteadily in the air in surprise. "Yeah, Light?" Ryuk questioned, as he steadied himself.

"Rem. The Death Note she gave to Misa. Are they still in play?" Light asked, shortly.

Ryuk's eyes lit up in understanding. "Excellent question, Light. No, they're not. Rem died in the original timeline and she wasn't part of this world, so she didn't come back when this world's time was rewound. Her Death Note was long ago returned to the Shinigami King, as all owner-less Death Notes eventually are." He told Light, proudly.

Light blinked in shock, taking that in. So Rem was gone…because Shinigami weren't affected by time in the human realm…of course! "Then Gelus must also…" He whispered.

Ryuk let out a rocky laugh. "Of course, Light-o! Clever as always! Both

of them are dead as doornails!" He proclaimed, happily. He'd never known Gelus and he did not particularly like Rem, so all he felt was amusement. "He won't be able to save Misa this time. Do you think she's already dead?" He asked, curiously.

"No." Light replied, distractedly. "I remember her mentioning once the man that Kira killed who was on trial for killing her parents. I think it was just a short while back. She said that she was nearly killed by a stalker a little over a month after that, and I think I recall…" Light drew off as he whirled around and stood at his computer as he quickly turned it on. His fingers flew across the keys as he typed in a case he suddenly remembered from a little under a month ago.

Westley Borne . Yes, he remembered him. Accused of killing a couple in their own home in a failed home invasion, witnessed by their teenaged daughter. He had evidently been a neighbor and thought he had an opportunity while they were out, only for it to turn out to be the biggest mistake of his life. For privacy, no one besides him had been named in the media and Light hadn't needed to hack the court records to find the man's guilt.

A combination of looking at all the facts of the case, the lack of an alibi for him, and Ryuk's kind offer to follow him had allowed Light to be sure he was guilty. It never ceased to amaze Light how much a person's behavior could change when they thought they were alone and how much it could reveal about them as a person.

The trial was dragging on, too. Having a large amount of circumstantial evidence only was often the reason why people failed to be convicted, Light found. In this case, even having a witness was proving to not be enough because it was her word against his, and witness testimonies were notoriously flawed. There was no DNA evidence which would've been one of the only things that tied him objectively to the crime and Light could guess at how good his lawyer was.

As the trial dragged on, the clearly traumatized daughter was likely suffering greatly and the situation got worse. Because what was going on in the actual courtroom was secret for the moment, the news media had to come up with their own ideas of what was happening and as the trial drew on without the man being convicted, the news posited that the man might be innocent and that rumor spread.

It must have been absolutely miserable for the girl and it might end with the man being found Not Guilty…so that was when Light stepped in. If Light had remembered Misa for five minutes, he might have recognized the case or at least looked into the actual names of the people involved besides the defendant.

So he had already taken out the man who'd killed Misa's parents, it was too late to let the court system handle (or fail to handle) that particular grenade. The incident that had caused Misa's hero-worship of Kira had already happened. Well…hell. What was he going to do now?

"You could just let her die," Ryuk said, apparently following his thoughts through his expressions. "You didn't save her in the last timeline, so you wouldn't be changing anything you did…not that you've had a problem with that, anyway. Gelus is gone, so all you have to do is wait for nature to take its course. She was supposed to die in that encounter in the original timeline."

That's right… It was easy to forget that little fact in the sea of information, but it was worth noting. The reason Gelus had died when he'd saved Misa before was because she had been *meant* to die. Her lifespan had almost been up, but Gelus couldn't accept that. It was strange to think that Light would never have meant her and she never would have forced herself into his life if Gelus had just minded his own business…

Could he just turn his back? He really wanted to. His Shinigami self said that she was supposed to die to begin with and that she was going to

do nothing good for anybody in her life, anyway. All humans died eventually.

And yet…there was a part of him that felt bad about how he had used her. He was given little choice in the past to use her, but his lack of guilt over it then caused him guilt now. Wouldn't he be continuing what he had done back then if he just let her die? Using her when it's convenient and throwing her under the bus when *that's* convenient?

No, Light sighed. He really couldn't do that. But…he was still creeped out by her. He didn't think that his past offenses should force him to be near her when she too had done so much to hurt him, abusing him in different but similar ways to how he had abused her. As well, she had fallen in love with "Light Yagami" at first sight. She had loved his looks and the idea of him, as much as the idea of Kira. If she saw him again, he suspected he knew what would happen. It didn't really matter if she didn't have a Death Note, although it made her less dangerous.

So…what did he do?

What…

Oh.

Oh, maybe…yes, that could work! "Ryuk!" Light yelled again, whirling on the Shinigami.

"What, Light-o?!" Ryuk startled again. "You've really got to stop doing that!"

“I’m going to save Misa in Gelus’ place.” Light declared without hesitation.

“What?!” Ryuk teetered dangerously where he was reclining in the air. “Are you sure??”

“As sure as I can get.” Light responded without hesitation.

“But there’s no reason for it! She could easily cause you trouble again!” Ryuk objected, incredulous.

“Without Rem, it’ll be difficult for her to reach the threat level she was at before.” Light mused. “Besides, I have an idea.”

Ryuk froze mid-argument. “...an idea?”

Light gave his friend a smile and nodded. “She fell in love with Light Yagami, even over the idea of Kira, because she saw me and thought I looked perfect.” Light ignored the chill that went through his body at the thought. “So I just have to try and make sure she doesn’t see me. It won’t be *easy* , but…”

“What about Kira?” Ryuk tilted his head. “If you save her as Kira, she will be crazy for them just like before. She might not be able to find you without having a Death Note of her own, but she could still show up in Japan and cause trouble trying.”

Light nodded. “Unless…we give her a fake Kira to distract her from looking. If she thinks she’s found Kira, she might not like him as much as she liked me, but she at least won’t go looking for me. He’ll be able to handle her better than I did, anyway.”

“‘Him’? You have someone in mind?” Ryuk blinked as he slowly came to a conclusion. “Wait, you don’t mean–”

“That’s right!” Light smiled, brightly. “I just have to make Misa think that L is Kira!”

~ ⓚ ~

Naomi wasn’t sure what to do with her life now.

There had been a time, only a week ago, where she’d known exactly where her life was going. She was going to get married, become a housewife, and raise a family. She’d been excited, she’d been looking forward to it.

But had she, though?

Light Yagami. She’d barely been with the boy for an hour and yet his words still hung in her mind. Light Yagami was a very striking person, wasn’t he? Some people, you could just tell that they were meant for great things and Light was. He was also very mature for his age and he asked her things she wasn’t sure she could answer. For example…

Was she really looking forward to the life she’d imagined with Raye or was she just afraid to think too hard about it? The life *Raye* had imagined for them. As uncomfortable as thinking about it made her, Naomi couldn’t stop and the more she thought about it, the more aware she became of the fact that it was Raye who had put together the picture of their future. All of the things they were planning on doing were *his* ideas.

When did she leave herself behind to pursue them?

Light had been so gentle when he'd questioned her and yet each thing he said had hit a nerve. She was questioning everything now, something she'd refrained from doing for what felt like too long now. She'd fought with Raye that morning about it and he'd stormed out of the house, leaving her behind with her thoughts.

Naomi didn't know what to do with herself anymore. More and more, she was questioning whether she was right to quit her job. At the time, it had been one of the hardest things she'd ever done, but she'd convinced herself that quitting her job was making way for a brighter future for her. A beautiful home, a loving husband, and excitable children. *It isn't,* she told herself as she sat at the dining table of their rental apartment alone. *Like I don't want those things. It sounds amazing and I'd be happy to have them, but…*

But her job had made her happy, too.

Naomi checked the clock. It was early morning and they'd both slept badly. More importantly, she wondered when Raye was coming back. He'd been gone a while. Should she wait for him before doing anything? But why? She didn't feel like she'd make a decision she liked if she talked to him about it, anyway.

Without another moment's hesitation, Naomi went to their shared bedroom and picked up her purse. From it, she pulled the phone she was given specifically by Watari in case she decided to participate in the investigation. She sent a text that she would accept the position, using the exact words she was told to use in the event and barely two seconds passed before she got a confirmation text and the information that Watari would pick her up tomorrow and at what time.

Letting out a deep, relieved breath, Naomi sat in a chair and leaned back. She'd done it and it felt so good! She already felt her body buzzing with the excitement of getting on a new case and the whirling of her brain as she turned over what she knew about Kira and what she might discover. She was back in the game!

~ ❶ ~

Raye Penbar didn't know what was going on lately. He and Naomi had had a big fight and he'd left for a breather. He just couldn't understand why they were fighting, though. She was saying all sorts of things about wanting to join the Kira investigation and when he pointed out that she wasn't an investigator anymore, she sounded like she deeply regretted the fact.

Why, though? Hadn't they agreed that it would be best if she quit? Hadn't they both decided that her life would be at home with their family from that point onward? He didn't understand where all this was coming from, suddenly.

…He still felt bad about leaving her back there, though. Even if he was frustrated and needed a moment, now that he'd had it, he felt like he should have stayed there with her and talked it out. They should have come to an understanding and now here he was, wandering around in the early morning in the Kanto region of Japan with even the sun barely up, and all he felt was confusion and uncertainty.

I should go back. He decided. *We should talk.* Maybe if they did that, he could get to the bottom of what was making her so anxious and reassure her that it wasn't as big a deal as she thought it was.

Just as Raye was about to turn around, a slightly smaller arm caught him right above his elbow. Whirling around in surprise, Raye stared at the person in front of him.

What is a teenager doing out in the streets this early?

~ ❶ ~

Confusingly, a handful of minutes after she sent her text, the same phone rang and Naomi hurried to answer it. *Why call, though?* She couldn't help wondering. *They already said they were going to pick me up tomorrow…*

"Misora." She answered.

"Ms. Misora, I'm afraid we have some terrible news. We're sending a car to pick you up right away." Watari's voice came out clearly through the phone, his words causing an unpleasant *thump* of Naomi's heart.

"What's going on?" Her voice shook almost imperceptibly as she spoke.

"We just got a blackmail letter delivered to our location, threatening the life of one of the FBI agents working for us if we don't meet their demands. L believes it to be the work of Kira." The old man audibly drew in a breath. "…it's your fiance, Agent Penbar. Ms. Misora, do you have any idea where your fiance is right now?"

Naomi's fingers quivered where she held the phone to her ear.

No…she didn't.

~ ❻ ~

Light grumbled indecipherable nonsense as he flopped around in his bed, trying to reach his cell phone which was ringing on his bedside table. Finally, he managed to grab it, he quickly glanced at the Caller ID before deciding he'd answer even if he didn't recognize the number calling him and put the phone to his ear. "...hello?" He whispered hoarsely. How early was it?

"Light! I'm so sorry to bother you, but…" Light's eyes popped open, defying his exhaustion. Why was Naomi calling him and how? He didn't give her his number. He'd sort of hoped he'd run into her plenty during the investigation, so giving her number was unnecessary.

"Ms. Misora..? What's going on?" She sounded panicked, he realized as his brain started coming back online. Scared.

"I'm sorry for bothering you so early like this and I know you have nothing to do with the Kira Investigation…" She apologized again. "But I couldn't resist. I felt like I *had* to ask you in particular for help, you were so insightful before."

"It's fine if you need my help, but about what?" Light asked, so very confused. Whatever he could've expected, it wasn't what she said. Light experienced a short moment of shock as he processed it and then he shot up in bed.

"Wait!" He yelled, startling Ryuk off the bed as he did. "Kira did *what?* "

Chapter End Notes

There's been a disturbance in the force

Dangerous Unknowns

Chapter Summary

Light meets with Naomi and forms some suspicions. L is being L.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took me a while to get out, but it's here!

Two things of not terrible importance but a little significance that might be breezed through in Light's conversation with Naomi: Light talks about L loving his privacy and how he deals with things and does so in more familiar terms than he's aware he's doing. Additionally, Light refers to Kira as a criminal, something he never would have done in the previous timeline. He does genuinely see himself as a criminal this time around, he's not interested in making excuses for himself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light shivered slightly in the early morning cold as he made his way down the street. This was supposedly the time and place where Raye Penbar was kidnapped. *So…he disappeared from this street.* Light thought to himself as his eyes steadily roamed the area.

"What are you looking for?" Ryuk asked, flying behind him as usual.

"I don't know." Light admitted. "I don't even know what happened, besides the fact that I'm being blamed for it."

He had made a meeting with Naomi soon. They would meet at a and talk over the case. After she called him the previous morning, she said that she was going to be picked up and brought to L so that she could be informed about what they knew and offered a part in the investigation so they couldn't meet that day. Since she'd asked Light for his aid, she agreed that she would tell him everything she knew the next day. As it stood, he only currently knew that this was where it happened and the rough timeframe it happened in.

“Who would want to kidnap Raye Penbar?” Light pondered the unanswerable question. “He doesn’t even live here normally, he’s a foreigner. Could someone have followed him here from America?”

He had some time before he needed to be at the apartment she was staying in. He might have been lingering a bit too long, but he was borderline desperate to find something that could make sense of what was going on here.

And what was up with that letter? Light thought, aggressively.

He knew next to nothing about the contents of the letter, just that it existed and that it was some kind of blackmail letter. Something leveraging Raye Penbar’s life against the Kira Investigation.

Is it some of Kira’s supporters? Light wondered before shaking his head. *It won’t do any good wildly cycling through theories. I need to stay focused. Naomi asked for my help and I do want to solve this for her, but even more than that…*

L might not solve this on his own. From his brief phone call with Naomi, he knew that he was already being blamed for this, even without anything concrete tying him to it. And L…L was like a dog with a bone. If he’d already gotten it in his head that it was Kira, as it seemed he now had, then Light couldn’t delude himself into having faith that the man would ever extricate himself from that hole. Once an idea was in that man’s head, it was absolutely hellish trying to get it out again.

Sighing, Light cast one last lingering look around the desolate area and again started his progress towards where Naomi said her rental was.

~ ❶ ~

Light knocked on the door of the rental apartment, mentally checking he'd gotten the place right. It would be awkward, otherwise. Thankfully, he didn't need to worry about that for long, as the door was practically wrenched open with a worried and hopeful-looking Naomi standing in the doorway. Once she saw Light, her features lit up and she gave a relieved smile.

"Light! Thank you for coming, I know it's early." She said, sounding a little apologetic. She immediately stepped aside and ushered Light into the apartment, closing the door behind them.

"It's alright. I would've wanted to come here early anyway." Light assured as he took his coat off. "And I imagine you're feeling antsy, eager to make some progress. I'm so sorry about your fiance."

Naomi gave a shaky sigh. "I just wish I knew whether he was safe or not. I know L got that note, but all I can think of is that it doesn't prove anything. He could still be…" She drew off, unwilling to say it yet.

"I really am sorry about this." Light turned to her. He placed his hands on both of her shoulders and looked directly into her eyes, trying to get his sincerity across to her. "But I swear that I will do whatever I can to help the both of you."

Naomi stared right back at him for what felt like an hour before her expression crumbled slightly. She didn't look like she altogether knew how to handle Light's support, but he caught a mixture of surprise, relief, and appreciation. Still, she was holding herself together very well throughout this whole ordeal and ultimately managed a

determined nod in response. “We should sit down and talk, then.” She directed him over to the sitting room. Finally, Light was going to get to hear more about the investigation.

Light controlled the urge to sigh as he thought about what L might have said regarding his suspicions. This was going to be a trial. Light knew L better than almost anyone, he felt. L would probably fail to think properly about the possibility of Kira not being involved. He’d rather chase down every way that Kira could have done this than spend five minutes on the “slim” chance it wasn’t Kira.

~ ⓚ ~

L was sure this was the work of Kira.

Nothing else made sense. Clearly, Kira was feeling threatened by the investigation and this was the result, Raye Penbar’s death. Well, L didn’t actually know that Mr. Penbar was dead, but the chances of his survival were dismal. After all, he was an FBI agent.

Hardly the kind of person that could be kidnapped so easily, which made the chances that Kira used their power to control individuals before their death to abduct Agent Penbar. It was unknown if Kira could control someone without killing them, but so far, the only instances they had of Kira controlling someone resulted in their deaths. Kira could very well have done that and then proceeded to pretend that Penbar was still alive to use against the investigation.

L couldn’t proceed under that assumption, though. If there was a chance that Agent Penbar was still alive, he was obligated to try and preserve that life. As well, neither Naomi nor the officers he was currently working with would be comfortable operating under such an assumption. Naomi, as his fiance, L could accept. It must be very hard for her.

However, he found himself frequently annoyed by the men he was working with. Their emotions were so wild and their sensibilities so soft that L wondered how they survived in this line of work, at all. Only Chief Yagami seemed to be able to steel himself properly and it showed when L was forced to tell them about the FBI's presence in Japan the day before. He really hadn't had much of a choice in that regard. L couldn't keep this a secret from the rest of the investigators very easily and there were, of course, additional reasons that he chose to be out with it.

As expected, there was a huge blowup from the group at large. The dullards made all sorts of loud demands or just took the opportunity to yell at him. L, with the utmost calm, let them do it as he popped a candy into his mouth every so often. He never stopped staring at his laptop, their collective tantrum didn't deserve that much attention from him. Aizawa was particularly riled by his lack of attention, but the police chief was able to get him back in line before he did something quite unfortunate.

Chief Yagami had actually been very understanding about why he took the actions that he did, explaining the reasoning behind L's actions so that he didn't need to do it himself. L appreciated that, especially as his weighing in caused the other investigators to fall in line and the group could finally continue on in their conversation. The group was galvanized before Naomi arrived at the hotel, absolutely ready to find the missing FBI agent. Sadly…they didn't have much by the end of that meeting and Naomi, in a move that L hadn't expected, declined the offer to stay over for the night, insisting that it would be better for her to go home.

It was the next day and L found himself reduced to pouring over the note they'd received that had first alerted them to the danger posed to the agent. The words and language used wasn't anything special - in fact, he was almost inclined to call it overly simple - and it didn't give away much. The demands didn't appear to make any sense, either.

The language used in this part of the letter came across as clustered and confused as if the writer was uncomfortable as they wrote it, but it basically amounted to calling off their investigation. It was especially strange because Kira if they wrote it, should know that there was no way L would or even could simply disband the Kira Investigation.

It was difficult for L to wrap his mind around, but he eventually came to the conclusion that Kira was *trying* to confuse him. It was certainly working, L was more baffled by the moment as he looked into this recent development in the investigation. Kira possibly wanted L to be deterred from the idea that it was them so that the detective would waste time chasing down other leads while Kira did…something. He would find out what and hopefully with it, find Kira.

L grit his teeth. At this rate, he was going to need to come forward to the Japanese police about his burgeoning suspicions regarding Light Yagami. He didn't want to bring the boy up until he had gathered more information on him, but he may be left with no choice due to this incident. Not if he wanted to find who was behind the attack on Penbar, at any rate.

Even if he hadn't already had some ill-defined suspicions about the younger Yagami, the boy definitely would have come into the center of this whole thing when Agent Penbar went missing. After all, aside from one other family, the only family that this particular agent had been assigned to was the Yagamis. It was wholly too suspicious that Agent Penbar had just finished his surveillance on Light Yagami and turned in his report shortly before he was kidnapped.

How could Light Yagami have nothing to do with this? He couldn't believe it was nothing to do with the boy who had raised so many questions in his mind with just the one pseudo-enocunter, but he would admit to not having enough information. He wasn't certain that the younger Yagami had something to do with Kira or indeed was Kira himself, but at the moment he was the only person who L felt was truly suspicious.

If there was a chance he was involved, then L wanted to know in what way and how much. Time was of the essence in these sorts of situations, L knew this deeply. If they didn't uncover any new information relating to Agent Penbar's disappearance, then L would need to bring to Chief Yagami's attention the questions regarding his son.

After all, with the Japanese police working so closely with him on this, it would only burn his bridges if he set up surveillance in the home of the Chief of Police without notifying him first.

~ ❶ ~

"And that is what we know about it so far. Not much, I know." Naomi admitted once she was done catching Light up on everything the team had gone through the day before.

Light considered it all. Her fiance had basically disappeared without a trace and he had already told Naomi that he didn't think anyone in particular was Kira, so he had no suspicions.

"But Naomi, it might not even be Kira." Light started, gently. He knew that he couldn't be too insistent about this or it would come off as incredibly odd. He didn't want to raise any alarm with this.

Naomi startled and looked at him with wide eyes. "What are you talking about? Of course, it's Kira! He-He was here to investigate Kira, how could it be anyone else?" She looked genuinely confused.

"I just think that it would be a mistake to blind ourselves to any of the other possibilities. Kira is *not* the only criminal in the world, not by a

long shot."

"Still, it doesn't make sense for anyone else to…" Naomi interjected, but Light gently cut her off before she could continue down that line of thinking.

"I really think that the world doesn't always make sense. The universe and humans are chaotic, they don't always act the way you think they should." Light informed her, some of his Shinigami poking through and she felt almost pinned by his gaze. "I know it might not be the first thought on the mind, but there's always the chance that Kira isn't involved and if they aren't, then the worst thing we can do is chase down that idea to the exclusion of all others."

"I don't know…" Naomi seemed to be considering it though, as her eyes roamed around the room. "Who else would take Raye? Who else would have a reason to do that? But I do understand what you're saying. We shouldn't ignore any options, no matter how unlikely they look. I'll keep it in mind." She returned her gaze to him, more determined than it had been before.

Good. This was good. "As well…" Light steadied himself internally and pressed on. "This doesn't seem like Kira to me."

"Doesn't seem like Kira?" Naomi muttered, looking at him carefully.

Light nodded. "Aside from the fact that the writer of the letter never signed the letter or claimed to be Kira in any way…Kira does things that are well thought out, they're a careful planner. "From what I've heard, the letter doesn't make any sense and the reasons for sending it aren't clear. I get that maybe Kira is doing something unexpected and we might not know what that is yet, but it just seems too random." He pondered, thinking aloud. "The kidnapping of your fiance, the letter, the demands in it, the complete lack of action after this…it all just

feels random, like it has little thought and no meaning behind it all."

"That…" Naomi looked surprised. "Now that you mention it, I haven't seen much of Kira's overt actions up until now, but it does seem like it doesn't fit. And what you said about there being no action after the letter…that doesn't make sense, either. From what little I've seen, Kira is an active person, they act rather than react. Clearly, the perpetrator here is waiting for us to call off the investigation, but they've put themself in a situation where all they can do *is* wait. Kira is confident and assertive. But this person, whoever wrote the note…well, on closer reflection, they really lacked confidence."

Light took this revelation in, thoughtfully. "I didn't see the letter the way you did, so I can't judge by how it was written unless I see it."

"I'm sure if you saw it, you would be able to give a wonderful view of the investigation," Naomi reassured him.

Light smiled brightly at her effort. "Thank you. It would help if I could see it, but I don't think I strictly need to. I trust what you observed about the person who wrote it, so that begs a question…if the writer lacked confidence or was unsure, then why did they do all this in the first place?"

Naomi was hit so hard by the question that she appeared to be in shock momentarily. "Why indeed..? Could they be someone inexperienced in this sort of crime? But that doesn't make any sense, either. My fiance is no lightweight, he couldn't be taken down so easily by some amateur."

Light realized he was getting somewhere. "Why the kidnapping? Why the letter? Kidnapping an FBI agent is a huge step, something that not a lot of people, even career criminals, feel prepared to take. Why did they do it and why do they seem unsure now?"

“Could they be second-guessing their actions?” Naomi wondered.

It was more peculiar the more he thought about it. Why take this step if they were in any way unsure where they were going with it? It was almost like they didn’t think it through… “If that’s the case,” Light continued with his thought. “Then maybe we can use that.

Naomi’s head swiveled towards him. “How so?”

Light leaned forward. “Do you think you can talk L into having routine interruptions on television regarding your fiance?”

Naomi looked surprised and pensive. “He might want to keep it a secret that an FBI agent has gone missing, he might not go for it.”

“They don’t necessarily have to say that he’s an FBI agent.” Light pressed. “Just show his photo and give his name. They can also say that he has a fiance that’s very worried about him and that the police are very invested in finding him as quickly as possible. That might be enough. If what we think about the person who abducted him is correct, then there are two likely options that’ll result from this: 1) The person feels worried and regretful and lets your fiance go. 2) They get nervous that the police are closing in on them, freaks out, and slips up.”

“Exploiting his apparent emotional state enough for him to make a mistake…it could work!” She exclaimed excitedly, some of the life coming back to her facial features as she considered it.

Light found himself smiling in response to her own. “It could. I know L likes his secrets and dealing with things in-house, but if you can

convince him to do even this small information reveal, we could pressure the criminal to do something. Or, almost as good, we could convince someone who might have seen something to come forward with information. I understand it's pretty common for the police to do that, so…" Light purposely drew off, knowing that he had done his best. Now he had to see what she would do.

"What you said makes a lot of sense, Light." Naomi reflected. He could already see her mind whirling as she thought through the effects his idea could have if put into practice. "It might be the best chance we have at the moment. L has already had the letter sent in to be analyzed and fingerprinted. Expedited, of course. We don't have anything of substance at the moment. That might change when I go to see him again tomorrow, but the way I see it, yours is the only lead we can follow right now. I'll talk to L about it." She promised him, seriously.

"Thank you." Light really was grateful. He wasn't sure if he could get to see and convince L to do this without her, but now he had a chance. If this worked even a little bit, they could finally get some information to find out what was going on. He and Ryuk could do a lot with their abilities, but in this situation, they felt powerless. They couldn't *do* anything besides asking questions, not until they got a viable answer.

He just had to keep fishing until he hooked something.

Chapter End Notes

> I'm hoping to end the case in the next chapter. At any rate, next chapter is definitely when Naomi will find out that L suspects Light of…something…and the surveillance!

Not Yet Under Control

Chapter Summary

Naomi gets to talk to L about Light's idea and a deal is struck.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry it took so long to get this chapter out (I was working on it in bits and pieces), but I dragged myself out of the third circle to bring it to you! I was initially going to have at least one more POV in it (L's). but I decided to push that to the next chapter so that I could get this out to you guys sooner.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Naomi next got picked up and taken to where L was staying this time, she had with her the confidence of someone on a mission, Light's words ringing in her head. They had nothing right now, and L's efforts to uncover where her fiance had gone had yielded nothing, but if she could convince L to release just a little bit of information to the public then maybe, just maybe, they could find him.

She had been convinced, as they had all been, that it was the work of Kira, but talking with Light had given her clarity. He'd pointed out weird aspects of the case that didn't align with it being Kira who'd done it. Sure, the blackmail letter regarding her fiance was delivered to where L was staying, and figuring out where he was at was no small feat, but it didn't mean the person was Kira. On the contrary, Light had convinced her that it wasn't.

And if it wasn't Kira…then her fiance might still be alive. She hadn't had much hope that he was alive if it was Kira that had taken him, but an ordinary criminal might not be so hasty to kill him. He could still be alive!

At any rate, while L still changed hotels routinely, he had left someone permanently stationed at the hotel the blackmail letter had been delivered to just in case something else showed up at that location. As

she arrived at L's new hotel room, she arrived upon a familiar sight.

The entire Japanese Police force that was still involved in the Kira case had taken up an almost permanent residence with L as they tried to solve the case of the missing FBI agent. She could tell they weren't happy to find out that the FBI was in Japan to investigate them. It was nothing they'd said to her, of course, but something she figured from the attitudes that some of the individuals displayed towards L. It was one of sheer annoyance and insult, she'd seen it plenty of time in her line of work.

Or…her old line of work, anyway. Something else LIght had said crossed her mind at that thought, but she shook it off for the moment. She had a job to do, after all.

"Welcome, Ms. Misora. Please take a seat." L muttered at her arrival, his eyes never once moving from the computer he was on. He was the only one who didn't look completely exhausted. The other investigators were going through papers or notes all around the room.

Naomi grabbed a seat but dragged it closer to L before sitting down. It became the most advantageous point in the room for what she wanted. Naomi went over in her head how she wanted to bring this up to L. She would have to admit that she was passing information to someone outside of the investigation. She'd had more than enough experience with giving her superiors bad news. She'd also had to admit to dumb mistakes she'd made to men above her who were far more unreasonable than L. Compared to those moments in her career, she was sure that she would have an easier time with L…the other investigators, she wasn't sure.

Eventually, she snapped out of her deep thoughts only to see L staring straight at her. She didn't know how long he had been doing that for, but she felt a twinge of nervousness at what he might have observed while she was unaware. Still, she shook herself and used this as her opportunity to start the conversation that they needed to have.

“Have you made any more discoveries in the investigation into my fiance, Ryuzaki?” Naomi started, only barely remembering to use the code name that he had given her to use with him the last time she was there.

“Not yet.” L admitted, neither blinking nor removing his gaze from her face. “I apologize for the slowness of our investigation.” He added, tonelessly.

Naomi nodded. She’d expected that to be the case, given how things had been progressing so far. Still, she could hardly call it slow. It had only been a few days, after all. It felt slow-going to her because she was worried sick about Raye, but she was used to cases that took months. Perhaps L wasn’t, though.

“I…have to admit something to you, Ryuzaki,” She continued.

L tilted his head. “Oh? And what is that?”

Naomi squared her shoulders. “I have been sharing information from this part of the investigation with a civilian.”

She heard several papers being dropped behind her, as that statement had gotten the attention of the other investigators. “ *What?* ” She heard one of them say but she didn’t move her gaze from L’s. For his part, L only blinked once at the admission.

“And who have you shared this information with?” L inquired, getting right to the point immediately. How so like himself.

“Yes, please! You must tell us who you’ve spoken to at once!” That was definitely Chief Yagami. He sounded reasonably concerned with who might know such crucial information. Naomi felt a twinge of guilt but quickly suppressed it. No matter what, she couldn’t believe that seeking Light’s help in this was a mistake. She felt deep in her bones that he could help. Now, she just had to convince the others.

“It was actually your son, Light.” She informed the room, allowing for no weakness to make it into her voice.

“Light?!” Chief Yagami jumped up from his chair and looked at her in shock.

“Light…” L’s eyes lit up in curiosity and…excitement? He quickly followed up with another question. “Did he approach you about it?”

“No, he didn’t.” Naomi was quick to straighten that out. “I approached him myself.”

L hummed. “And why did you do that?”

That was the question she had been hoping for. “When I talked with him before, he struck me as an intelligent and insightful boy.” She started to explain herself. “Maybe it wasn’t my role in the investigation to pull unauthorized people into the investigation, but as his fiance, I wanted as many eyes on the case as I could get. I believe that he can help.”

Chief Yagami looked like he didn’t know what to think about the situation and the other investigators around him had expressions that ranged from surprised to thoughtful, to upset or angry. She turned her attention back to L, whose expression she couldn’t hope to decipher.

The moment of thoughtful silence lasted for a handful of seconds and no one seemed eager to break it while L thought. “I find Light intelligent, as well,” L spoke suddenly. Naomi’s experience kept her from jumping at the suddenness of it. “I have not had any personal interaction with him so far, but this does seem to be the case. Are you finding yourself trusting Light?” He inquired.

This Naomi could answer with relative ease. “Yes.” She stated, decisively. “He’s given me every reason to trust him and no reasons to distrust him.”

L seemed to take this in readily as if he’d been expecting that answer. “Indeed. That may well be the case.” Was his restrained answer. “Well, what has Light said about the subject?”

This was going better than Naomi had thought it would, so far, and she found herself trying not to become wary over it. L *was* an unemotional and open-minded person, she reminded herself. It was only natural that he would want all of the information before he came to any sort of decision. She repeated what Light had observed to L and the others in the room. Occasionally, she was interrupted by questions from the other investigators for clarification, but on the whole, L remained silent and simply listened to her.

That brought her around to what she really wanted to talk about. “Actually, Light had an idea that I think might bring a break in the investigation.” At this, everyone in the room beside the main two grew quiet. Even if not all of them were happy about Light being stuck up in the investigation without them knowing, they all wanted to hear what his idea was.

After all, not a single person who had worked with or around Cheif Yagami had failed to hear tell of his son, Light. His son’s rumored brilliance and natural insight into investigations. Quite a few

individuals had refused to believe the stories at first, finding it too difficult to imagine that someone so young could be so perfect, but their fellow officers were quick to inform them that Light had actually taken part in several unusually difficult cases and solved them. No one was allowed to doubt Light's ability or the fact that he would make an amazing investigator, one day.

"And? What is this idea of his?" L sounded nonchalant, but Naomi would swear that she saw him lean forward a little in his seat.

Naomi spoke directly. "He thinks that you should put a story about it out into the media."

"I'm not sure that that would work." L leaned back in his seat - he had definitely leaned forward! - and picked up a spoon to stir a cup of tea he had. Naomi felt disappointed by his immediate dismissal, even if it had been expected. She stayed quiet for a few seconds, unsure if she should say anything else immediately, and L himself was silent for a time. Then, "What did he hope to gain from this?"

"He…well, he believes that it will encourage someone with information to come forward and put pressure on the perpetrator," Naomi stated.

L hummed in mild interest. "He thinks Kira will react to pressure?"

"He doesn't think it's Kira."

L stopped. Then quietly, "He doesn't, huh?" He fell silent again.

Naomi couldn't stop herself from shifting uncomfortably in her chair,

this time. There was *something* in that simple sentence that permeated the air. She couldn't understand what, but there was an underlying tone, there. Naomi couldn't bring herself to speak and the minute dragged on into two and then three.

Finally, "So Light wants us to put out a news story." He seemed to almost be talking to himself at this point. Naomi seized on it, anyway.

"Yes." She nodded. "He said we could keep it vague, we wouldn't even need to say that he's an FBI agent. Just give his name and picture, say he's missing, and some other small things to tug at heartstrings. Saying the police are looking hard for him might also be good for increasing the pressure."

L continued his thoughtful silence for a few more seconds, obviously thinking about something very hard, but then he made just one more inquiry. "You trust Light Yagami. You also agree with this idea, then?"

It felt like a loaded question. She answered anyway. "Yes. I think it's the best chance we have to find Raye soon. Before…" She couldn't continue along that track.

"Then…" L placed his cup down. "I'll agree to the idea that you and Light came up with, but under one condition." He said.

"And what would that be?" Naomi leaned forward expectantly. What would he want for it?

"I want your cooperation in setting up extensive, 24-hour surveillance on Light Yagami, effective immediately." He informed, without any further preamble.

The room exploded.

"What!" Chief Yagami yelled, standing up again. Miscellaneous questions and complaints overlapped each other as each of the investigators let their own feelings be known. Naomi herself was comparatively quiet, staring at L with wide eyes.

Surveillance on Light? Why does he want that? To protect him? "Why?" She found herself asking and then as if jerked back to herself by the sound of her own voice, she straightened her shoulders and stared back at him more evenly.

"I've had an interest in the younger Yagami for a short time now. In truth, I suspect him of having something to do with Kira." L replied as if his words were no big deal.

"You suspect *Light?*" If it had been anyone else, Naomi would have instantly supported L because he was a great detective. But with Light, she just couldn't see it. Light was sweet and thoughtful from the first moment they met and his concern over her fiance seemed genuine. She simply couldn't think him capable of working with Kira, she couldn't.

He hummed. "I do suspect him." L said, directly. "I think he may be the key to this whole investigation, even if I don't have proof yet, which is why I want the surveillance. In exchange for the news story, I would ask that you and Chief Yagami agree to let me put surveillance in the Yagami household on Light's behalf. He can't know about it, of course, so you will have to make the agreement for him." He directed that last statement at Naomi.

"Hole on!" Chief Yagami approached them, glaring at L. "What has my

son done that made you think he could have *anything* to do with Kira?"

"His presence just seems suspicious, that's all." L answered vaguely, clearly keeping some things to himself. The Chief looked slack-jawed at L.

"If," Naomi started, sensing the opportunity. "If we agree to this on Light's behalf, you'll go through with our idea?" She checked. She needed to know before she accepted anything. The idea of making the decision for Light and then keeping it from him made her extremely uncomfortable.

"Of course. That's our agreement." L agreed, readily. He began fielding complaints from Light's father as Naomi allowed herself to get lost in her thoughts again. If she was going to keep the agreement with L and not let Light know, then she couldn't ask his opinion for this. She had to decide for herself.

Thinking to herself, she thought that Light would eventually agree if he'd been asked about it. Light seemed, to her, to be a strong boy who would be willing to submit himself to whatever was needed to get further in a case. *I think if he was here, he would tell me to agree to it.* Naomi decided. That seemed like something he would say.

She took a deep breath. "I agree." She said firmly, cutting off the two men who had continued talking while she was lost in thought. Chief Yagami looked frustrated, but both he and L turned to her as she spoke.

"With all due respect, Ms. Misora," Chief Yagami started, looking surprised that she had so quickly agreed to L's proposal. "But Light is my son. And this is about my family and our home. I don't feel that you're qualified to give your approval for something like this."

“I asked for her opinion, as well as yours.” L defended her. “She is working with Light, after all.”

“That’s another thing! I don’t like my son being involved with the investigation. It’s dangerous! An FBI Agent has already been kidnapped. My son is only in high school!” The man was clearly working himself up. L remained apathetic, but Naomi felt a guilty pinch in her stomach at getting Light involved when he hadn’t been interested in the Kira Investigation, to begin with. But something occurred to her and she interrupted before he could go on any longer.

“But ultimately, we should take into account what Light would want. Maybe I’m wrong, but I don’t think that he would be okay with the investigation continuing to stall for his sake.” She truly believed that to be the case. Light is made of sterner stuff than that, he wouldn’t like being treated like a child. “And if L is truly suspicious of Light, then his suspicions won’t go away unless he has some kind of proof that Light hasn’t done anything wrong.”

She gave Chief Yagami a strong look. “I believe Light is innocent. If you believe that too, then putting your home under surveillance will be enough to put an end to it. Putting him under surveillance would not just be what’s best for finding my fiance, but also what’s best for Light. We can prove he didn’t do anything wrong.”

Chief Yagami stared at her in surprise before collecting himself and turning to L. “Ryuzaki, do you really need to add surveillance to my household for me to prove that my son hasn’t got anything to do with Kira?” He asked, his voice weary.

“It would be the most expedient way, yes. Presumably, Kira wouldn’t be able to kill without some outward sign that he’s doing it. If we, say, put video cameras around the house and especially in Light’s room, then we would be able to verify in a relatively short time whether or not Light is truly innocent.” He answered without looking at either of

them.

Chief Yagami looked between her and L several times before he sighed heavily. “Alright, I’ll agree, as well. But if we’re going to do this, I don’t want to have to do it again so we’re doing it right the first time. I want all areas of my home covered so there are no blindspots. I don’t want anyone arguing that Light could have been doing something nefarious where the cameras couldn’t see him.” He turned his back on them and started walking back to his original seat.

“I was going to do that anyway.” L replied to his back. To Naomi, he said, “Thank you for your cooperation. Watari will get the details sorted, right away.”

“I did it for Light and my fiance.” Naomi wanted to make sure he knew that. “I don’t at all think you’re right about Light. I actually don’t know what you’re thinking, but if this was the only way to move forward in the investigation, then let’s do it.”

She took a deep breath and spoke the words to herself, hardly being able to believe them.

“Light’s going under surveillance.”

Chapter End Notes

This is the last chapter before we start to get our resolution to the Case of the Missing FBI Agent.

Surveillance Start

Chapter Summary

> Light definitely profiles his sister and has a little fun playing with almost everybody.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the weekend he'd just had, Light's school day felt unusually normal. Painfully ordinary, but that was how it always went. He couldn't stop thinking about the recent developments in the Kira Case, though, and he barely kept his usual high performance throughout the day. Barely, but he still managed to, even as he was so thoroughly distracted. After all, at least one lifetime of striving to be the best in all areas created something akin to an instinct. All the same, it was a relief when he got back home and could let the Perfect Student act down just a little bit.

Light called out that he was home, but there was no answer. Something pricked at the back of his mind as usually, his mother was home with some kind of greeting when he got back, even if she was busy with something. *Maybe she went out for groceries and it's taking a while,* Light thought.

A brief memory flashed through Light's mind at the consideration. It was a scene from when he was much younger, just about to enter middle school. He'd grown a recent interest in helping his mom around the house at the time and the following events had confused him at that age. When he'd helped his mother once, she'd been very grateful and praised him highly for it. When he'd begun doing it several times, she simply accepted the help. When it had started being a habit of his, she'd thanked him but it had been lackluster and she'd tacked on an additional statement after some thought. She told him that even though she's grateful for the help, if he has the time to be doing those things, then his effort would be better spent on school.

At the time, he was still a kid and he didn't understand the change in her behavior. Why a little help was great but more was undesirable. The statement, as soft a reprimand as it was, got under his skin though and he'd stopped helping her around the house after that. If she noticed, she never said a word about it to him.

Light didn't completely understand even as a young adult, but his childish confusion had long ago been washed away by a more adult weariness. After all, he'd gotten tired, so very tired, long ago about being redirected to school or homework whenever one of his parents got it into their heads that he should be working harder. He didn't have the wherewithal to question the why's of it anymore.

As Light headed up the stairs to the door, his boring day took an irreversible turn. It was right as he stopped in front of his door that he noticed the handle. While he hadn't put a piece of paper in his door or the pen on the door hinge, he'd still been doing that old trick of resetting the handle into a forced position every time he left his room. Aside from serving a purpose, it was also comforting for him in a way. A bit of a taste of what used to be.

Pausing his hand in the air for only a fraction of a second before he continued its journey to grab the door handle, Light glanced discreetly behind him. *Ryuk. Without* saying a thing, he met Ryuk's eyes and gave him a look.

"Oh! Got it!" Ryuk had a feeling he knew what that look was and as Light swung his bedroom door open with deliberate casualness, his Shinigami friend flew past him and beat him into the space.

Within seconds, he was milling about the room, invisible to anyone but the teenager and checking to make sure everything was okay for Light.

He only had to check a few spots before he had something to report. "Hey, Light! There are a bunch of cameras in your room! They look the same as the last time this happened."

Light didn't reply, but then Ryuk wasn't expecting him to, this time. They'd both done this whole song and dance before. Rather, Ryuk was feeling happy for his friend. Light had been hoping for just this development so though they hadn't been expecting it right now, he was glad to see those cameras.

Upon hearing Ryuk's proclamation, Light was forced to quickly raise a hand to cover his mouth and pretend to yawn in order to cover the smile that quickly swept across his face without his consent. Light really was happy to hear that! In all the chaos of Naomi's fiance going missing, he'd forgotten about this.

Of course! Light thought, obliged to keep his hand to his face as his smile just wouldn't leave. *Of course, L would use this opportunity to put me under surveillance. Last time, L had me as a suspect only because Raye was following me and then died. Now, I've not only been connected to an agent that's been kidnapped, but also that agent's fiance who I escorted right to L. Of course, he'd be interested in watching my movements and see me as the answer to Raye's kidnapping.*

Light nearly shook his head at himself for not thinking of that but didn't, knowing that now more than ever, he needed to maintain his outward appearance.

I haven't planned anything, Light thought as he sat at his desk. Even though he'd thought about this eventuality and written ahead in his Note for just such an occasion, he didn't have a set plan waiting in the wings for what he'd do while under surveillance. Well, he'd had a few daydreams about it that wouldn't be bad to bring into reality. And he was great at improvising so he'd have to see what he could come up with. No way could he let such an opportunity pass!

He'd have to keep in mind that his father was watching. Then again, that might make it better in some ways; put L in a more awkward position in the investigation. Light forced his oncoming smirk to turn into a benign smile as he rooted through his bag and pulled out a few items, almost everything besides the Death Note. He wouldn't be needing that for a while.

Light's other hand went to turn on the small TV he had in his room. A relatively small idea popped into his mind at that moment. He could make a little bit of a reputation for himself among the Kira investigators - that of someone who never really watches the news. Up until this point, he'd only ever watched the news in his bedroom anyway so all he had to do for this to become an established fact was not turn on any news channels himself and pay little attention to them when someone else did while he was under surveillance.

It was a pretty small thing, all things considered, but a small thorn in a person's side still caused pain. It would be quite the irksome fact of his behavior for L that would make it difficult to pin Kira's crimes on him, wouldn't it? A small taste of what was to come…

Thankfully, Light could get started on the right foot. Being the overly cautious person that he knew he was, Light always changed the channel he was on to something more benign before turning it off. So when he turned his TV set on, it immediately alighted onto a romantic drama that had been popular lately. Light, deciding that he needed some hobbies and personal interests outside of crime this time around, tried to get into different TV shows.

Most he found boring, but he was able to stir in himself some mild interest in romantic dramas when he started imagining himself and L in the romantic lead positions. Those particular imaginings moved him to laughter more than a few times when the leads did something that would be ridiculous for L or himself to do and imagining them doing those things was incredibly funny. The more he watched, the more he began to appreciate the shows for what they were.

As Light started to back in his chair to watch the show even though it was already halfway done, he jerked back up in his seat. His thoughts had just turned towards another little game he could play! Life was all about reputation, he knew this well. After all, it was his reputation that he'd built and was continuing to build that would make it difficult for L to convince people that Light could be a killer. Heck, it was his and his father's reputations in his past life that provided him so much protection. So if he was playing that kind of game with L…

Light stood up from his chair and maneuvered his TV to be more pointed towards his bed. Then he paced back to his bed and went to sit down on it. Seeing this, Ryuk scooched to the side to give him more room. Light flashed a discrete smile at him and sat cross-legged on the bed, grabbing a pillow along the way. Then he held the pillow to his chest in the most cliched way he could think of and settled back to watch as many episodes as he could before dinner. He was going to *binge!*

~ ❹ ~

L had been perplexed by the newest development in the Kira case. To be sure, Agent Penber being kidnapped and then finding out that his fiance, who also happened to be present in Japan, was someone he had personally worked with on a special case was indeed entirely unexpected. However, what L found most fascinating was how Light Yagami had, once again, become stuck up in the investigation into said FBI Agent's disappearance without his knowledge.

Why is it always that you find your way back into the center of things, Light? L wondered, deeply wishing that he would have the opportunity to ask the boy that question himself.

L was disappointed to hear that Light hadn't been the one to seek out information on the investigation into Raye Penbar's disappearance,

but that was the only disappointment he experienced. His mind was already spinning with *possibilities* . Naomi may have been the one to ask Light to join in looking for her fiance, but if Light was Kira, then he would have been clever enough to be thinking that many steps ahead when he met her at the police station.

If it was true that someone at the station really was an informant for Kira, it was a possibility that they could have informed Kira that Naomi was there and was asking about the investigation. Depending on how much Kira knew about the FBI agents, he may have known who she was when he met her or found out later. Every effort of Light's at that time could have been to earn her trust, knowing that he would eventually kidnap her fiance and she would look to him for help.

These were all only theories, of course. There was no objective proof for them and even L could admit that it sounded far-fetched. To be able to assume her behavior so accurately would either take a great deal of luck or a great deal of experience and Light may not even have anything to do with Kira. Light Yagami could very well be an innocent, ordinary teenager and L reminded himself that that was the most likely result. And yet…every time he closed his eyes and thought about what Kira might look like, he kept envisioning them to look something like Light. He was fixated on the boy for reasons that were hard to explain in any way other than intuition.

L was at that moment watching the video camera footage of the Yagami household, waiting for Light to come home and start his activities. Chief Yagami had insisted they be alone to watch his family, so the other investigators either went home or to a different room after the cameras had been placed.

The Chief might not have been home often, which he self-consciously admitted to, but he knew his family's schedules remarkably well. He'd known that his wife would be home, his children at school until their respective end times. A quick call from him to his wife asking her to deliver something he'd forgotten to the station got the home completely empty for the cameras to be placed.

As he waited on the edge of his seat for Light to come home, L couldn't help but think back to what Naomi said about Light's suspicions about the culprit of this little fiasco. *Or giant disaster, depending.* L thought. He'd asked the U.S. for a favor, after all, in sending a few of their agents over. Having one of those agents go missing would not go over well. Initially, he'd been able to keep Penber's disappearance a closely-held secret, but it wouldn't be long before they began to wonder where he was and why he wasn't reporting in.

The realization that one of their agents had been compromised would be hastened by the agreement he'd made with Naomi (and Light). The FBI response to seeing the news story L was prepared to release at any moment about Penber would be immediate. Hopefully, Watari would be able to handle that call when it came through. He didn't want to be distracted by his surveillance for even a moment, especially at the time that the story was being released across the media.

Still, Light's words, as told through Naomi, gave him a tantalizing tidbit to think about. What Light apparently said was not entirely surprising, he supposed. Many people accused of a crime wouldn't admit to doing it and they often denied heavily even when exposed to ironclad evidence. Yet, even if it wasn't entirely out of the realm of normalcy, L found himself mildly surprised by the move, anyway.

Why try to convince them that it isn't Kira? If Light wasn't Kira, then wouldn't he want it to be Kira so that they could be led to the killer sooner? And if Light was Kira, then shouldn't he be proud of what he'd done? L wasn't exactly expecting Light to brag about how he was guilty, but he'd taken Kira to be the type who wanted people to know that they were there. If Kira had done something, he would have thought that Kira would want them to think he'd done it.

Then again, L chewed on the thought. *Perhaps he's trying to misdirect us. If Light is Kira or working with them, then Light may be aware that we could use this incident to track him down. Kira is not* ***quite*** *as arrogant as*

I had initially thought they were. If Light were Kira, he may indeed want to convince us this isn't the work of Kira to gain some wiggle room for himself. And do…what with it? L pondered. Of course, he would need more data for that answer.

If Light *wasn't* Kira, then his observations about the letter's composition hold more weight. As soon as his conversation with Noami had finished, he'd looked at the letter once more in that new light. There was indeed a slight hesitation in the writing that L would admit was not very Kira-like. Kira was a much more fearless person who believed themself to be above humanity, in general.

Light had been correct, it would seem. Whether he was correct because he was a truly perceptive boy or because he had deliberately written the letter to seem unlike himself, remained to be seen. Regardless, L found himself extremely unwilling to consider that Kira could not be behind this kidnapping. The possibility that some other unknown person was the cause instead of Kira was difficult to stomach, given the fact that the agent who was kidnapped was in Japan to take a small part in the Kira Case. Who else here would have the motivation to pull such a stunt?

Briefly, L wondered a little about *Kira's* motivation to kidnap the agent. Did Penber perhaps see something he shouldn't have?

L was distracted from the thought by Light returning home. He heard more than saw Chief Yagami sit up in his seat and L himself focused more intensely on the cameras.

The first minute or so was relatively normal. After calling out his arrival and noting the lack of other people in the home, he proceeded up to his bedroom. There was a strange pause just before he entered his bedroom that gave L a moment of intrigue - did Light somehow know that his room had been tampered with? How? - before Light immediately entered into the room without hesitation and the thoughts were dismissed.

Light didn't appear to notice anything off about the space and proceeded to start relaxing, a perfectly normal thing to be doing after a day of school. Still, it hadn't been quite what he was expecting, insofar as he'd had expectations. With how the older Yagami talked about his son and the boy's school performance, he'd expected the boy to be more studious. Then again, there was no reason why he couldn't study later.

"Do you know much about your son's schedule?" L inquired, not taking his eyes off the screen.

"Not really," Soichiro admitted, looking deeply uncomfortable as he said it. "I haven't spent much time around my family for some time now and the Kira Case has only made it worse. My job takes up so much of my time and I work so hard most of the time…many nights I don't leave the office at all and when I do go home, all I can do is sleep." There was a deep weariness in his voice. He sounded bone tired.

L turned to stare at him for several long moments before going back to the camera feed. "I understand." And he did. He knew quite a bit about work consuming your life, leaving little left for anything else. Although in L's case, he hadn't had much of an outside life for his work to consume. He hadn't had many friends and no family except for Watari.

Onscreen, Light suddenly jolts into movement like he's realized something and pops out of his chair. At first, L had leaned forward in his seat, eager to see what the suspect was about to do, but he huffed in disappointment when all Light did was turn on his TV set. *He's just watching TV?* L thought in disappointment.

But he blinked in surprise when he saw what Light was watching. Slowly and without looking away from Light, L grabbed his cell phone

off of a side table and quickly pulled up Watari's number. "Yes, L?" Watari's voice came over the line.

"Watari, could you please look up information for me on a TV series called Boys Over Flowers?" He couldn't afford to take even a fraction of his attention off of the cameras to do it himself.

"Of course. One moment." Watari predictably responded. L stared at Light who, in turn, stared at his own screen as he listened to Watari typing over the phone. Then the man came back over the line, "It appears to be a recently aired romantic drama, centering around a high school girl and a small group of rich young boys. It's very popular, it seems."

L blinked in surprise at the information, taking a fresh look at what he could see of the TV show. The way Light had moved it to face the bed had given them a better view. Now that Watari mentioned it, he could see how it could be a teen drama.

"Thank you, Watari." L said, mulling this over. "Please do some more intensive research into this series, just in case there's some hidden meaning to it that Kira wants us to see." Watari agreed and hung up.

After placing his phone back on the table, L chanced a quick glance at the elder Yagami who had been suspiciously quiet. He was not entirely surprised to see the man staring disbelievingly at the screen. He could partially understand why. The Chief seemed like a man who subscribed to more traditional male/female roles and Light's behavior at that moment wasn't exactly masculine.

"Did you know your son liked to watch these kinds of shows?" L decided to prod.

“No…not at all,” Soichiro said quietly, still not looking away from his son.

L hummed. “I wonder…how much do you know about your son, exactly?”

At this, Soichiro jerked and whirled around to look at L. L, non-plussed, just calmly stared at the screen. “My son is not a killer and I will not believe otherwise!” He defended, heatedly.

“Hum…but you did say you’re rarely home, didn’t you? And you didn’t know about his viewing preferences.” L noted. He was honestly surprised himself. He knew, of course, that everyone had those secret habits or interests that they kept from everyone, even the people closest to them who thought they knew everything. Still…he hadn’t taken Light Yagami for the type.

“It’s a small thing.” Soichiro ground out. “I don’t need to know his interests to know what kind of person *my son* is!”

L let the words hang in the air for a few long seconds, then, “Is it?”

Soichiro looked puzzled at that. “What?”

L stared harder at the boy onscreen who was doing a good job of appearing to be absolutely harmless. “Is it really such a small matter?”

~ Ⓚ ~

Light was eventually called away from his binging by his mom's call of dinner. Although he was annoyed to leave his current episode right in the middle, he was decently happy for the break. Somewhere during the marathon watching, Ryuk remembered that he wouldn't be able to eat apples in the house with the cameras there again and had been loudly lamenting that fact ever since. Light slid out of bed and headed downstairs.

He'd been thinking about things he could do to have a little fun while the cameras were in his house. A good amount of things to clear himself to everyone besides L came to mind, but he was having trouble thinking of things to do just to screw around. Light proceeded to eat his dinner with his mother and sister, complimenting his mom on her cooking as he always did. Honestly, it was pretty obligatory and he just said it habitually at this point.

He half-listened as his sister chatted animatedly about whatever happened at school and their mother engaged her. He'd perfected his ability to completely zone out while looking interested early in his first life. He was briefly jerked out of his thoughts of L when his mom asked him something about how school was going. He answered and, as usual, she turned away after that. The news was playing on the living room TV and Light did his best to not even glance at the thing. He wanted to look completely disinterested. But then something happened.

"Hold on! We just received some important information!" The news reporter suddenly declared loudly, drawing the attention of his mother and sister. Light reluctantly took this as his excuse to look at the TV, as well. "We've got word of a high-profile missing person's case! We don't have a great deal of information yet, but he's a visiting member of the American government. This man has been named as Raye Penbar. He went missing early morning on-"

Light sat up straight in his chair as an image of Raye Penbar popped up onscreen next to the reporter. *Yes, yes, yes!* Light chanted in his head and a grin spread across his face.

Ryuk took this moment to fly to his side and share in LIght's excitement. "This is what you wanted, right? Looks like things are working out." He didn't expect a reply until later, knowing Light couldn't talk right then.

"His fiance is worried about him and misses him very much. If you have seen this man or have any information on his disappearance, please contact Chief of Police, Soichiro Yagami."

"Dad?" Sayu said, surprise shining through her voice. "Is this what dad's working on, right now?"

Naomi did it! She got L to agree! I knew she could, she's very tenacious. Hopefully, we can spook something out of the culprit soon or even strike gold with a witness! Light thought, excitedly. *I'm almost completely sure that the perpetrator will react! By the way the letter was written and the fact that no further contact has been attempted, I'm sure this person is unsure and hesitant. This will definitely scare them into being stupid.* The fact that this was a tactic that L had used on him in the past wasn't lost on Light. He knew its effectiveness firsthand.

Even though Light continued to think about it, the news report shut off quickly after that and it passed out of the conversation. Sayu was the first to finish dinner and immediately hopped up to change the television channel, exclaiming that a new episode of her favorite series was about to start. Before, Light would have mocked that kind of show, but that would make him a hypocrite now though. Light glanced at the actor on screen, briefly recognizing him as the same Hideki Ryuga that L had taken the identity of in their past lives, and wondered if L would do the same this time, before finishing his own dinner and standing up. Wait.

Light stopped and looked back at the man on TV. The reminder of L, mixed with the romantic setting of the episode gave him an idea of

something that would really mess with L. How to bring it up, how to bring it up…

“What are you watching, Sayu?” He tried to ask casually.

Sayu looked over at him in surprise from her position on the living room floor before she lit up. "Oh, it's this new drama I started watching! Hideki Ryuga stars in it! He's just the dreamiest!"

Light allowed his gaze to settle on Ryuga, respectively. "I've seen better." He commented, at last.

"Huh?" His sister blinked at him, clearly not expecting that response, and Light could see why. In his past life, he probably would've just given a disinterested "whatever" and left. "Well, it's not fair to compare Hideki to the girls at your school." She pointed out in visible confusion.

Here, Light shifted uncomfortably and not all of it was fake. He hadn't thought much about introducing his sexuality to his parents. Honestly, he hadn't thought it important at all; he was going to go after L regardless of anything else. He was being a little spontaneous with this one, but…

"I wasn't talking about the girls." Light waved his hand dismissively. "There are a lot of attractive guys around, you know. I think I find personalities way more attractive than looks, anyway."

Light pretended to look disinterested but he was cataloging the changes to the expression on Sayu's face. It seems she caught the implications of his words; her expression cycled through confused to surprised to recognition.

Please ask, please ask. Light chanted in his mind. Sayu was a curious little girl, so…

"Do you check out guys a lot, Light?" Her wide eyes peered at him, waiting. It wasn't said in her usual teasing manner but instead in genuine curiosity and Light found himself forcing down a smile at that.

“Time to exercise your acting chops!” Ryuk chuckled in the background.

“Wh-what? Don’t be ridiculous!” Light huffed and turned away, clearly flustered.

“You do!” She wasn’t smiling but she wasn’t frowning, either. She looked surprised, so surprised. She was looking at him as if she were seeing him for the first time.

Light wasn’t surprised. This probably flew in the face of every expectation she had for him, everything she thought she knew about her older brother. He wasn’t the same person he was in his past life, the person who was so invested in feeding into people’s expectations of him that he resorted to leading a double life until he finally snapped.

“Be quiet.” Light snapped for show, glancing around the room but he knew that their mother had stepped out of the room for a moment. He didn’t mind so much if his mother knew, but he suspected it would inconvenience him more if his sister knew. Humans could get so caught up in things like sexual orientation.

Sayu's mouth snapped shut for just a moment as she too looked for their mother. Then, as if she couldn't help herself, she asked, "Is there someone you like? Someone you think looks better than Hideki Ryuga?"

"I…" Light made sure to look uncomfortable as if he didn't know if she should answer her question, even if he had one.

"Playing around, aren't ya, Light?" Ryuk chuckled, floating on his back.

"Come on, Light! Pleeeease?" Sayu leaned forward, looking at him pleadingly.

"Well…" Light started, purposely looking reluctant. "I haven't actually seen what he looks like, but…"

"Haven't seen what he looks like?" Sayu repeated, blinking in surprise.

Light was ready. "You know how dad told us about L, the Great Detective?"

Sayu nodded, still unsure where this was going. "Yeah, I think I remember. He told us about the secretive detective a few years ago and mentioned him once or twice since then, but not much else. Why are you bringing that up?"Light blushed heavily at the question, his reaction so obvious that his sister immediately started talking again before Light had the chance to respond. "It's him?! You like HIM?" She burst out.

“I looked him up a little on my own.” Light added, defensively. “And maybe did a little hacking.” He muttered. “He is secretive, I’ll give him that, but he’s very impressive. They say he hasn’t failed to solve a case yet.” As Light allowed himself to gush a little, a sappy smile worked its way onto his face.

Sayu’s mouth nearly dropped open as she stared at him wide-eyed. “You really have a crush on him, don’t you? That nameless detective!”

“Whatever. I’m leaving.” Light huffed, looking embarrassed. He turned away back towards the stairs to the upper floor.

“Aw, don’t be like that!” Sayu called back at him but was stopped from saying more by their mom reentering the room.

"Sayu! Come and help me with the dishes." Their mom called, making her way to the sink.

"Aw, mom! My show's still on! Why can't Light help?" Sayu complained, getting distracted easily from their previous conversation.

"Your brother has studying to be doing. Come and help." She lightly reprimanded her daughter, waiting until the girl huffed and got up from her spot in front of the TV before turning back to the sink.

~ ❶ ~

Light pretended to storm back to his room and flopped back on his bed. He frowned and huffed, but on the inside, he was smirking. *That*

was fun.

Ryuk floated around him, chuckling softly. “Did you really need to declare your feelings point-blank to L and your dad?”

“Mm.” Light made a non-committal sound.

The Shinigami figured he knew what that meant. “I would’ve thought you’d want to do that in person when you met him, but I guess you just couldn’t help yourself, could you? Just had to make things difficult for L, don’t you?”

“Hm?” Light questioned under his breath without moving his lips, managing to sound somewhat smug, even then.

“Don’t think I didn’t notice.” Ryuk quipped. “You didn’t just possibly fluster him by declaring your affection for him on camera, but you did it knowing full well that your dad must be with him right now. There’s no way that won’t be awkward for the two of them. I think you managed to hit two birds with one stone, getting both L and your dad with this one.” He cackled crazily, taking a spot on the bed as Light closed his eyes to soak in the praise.

Well, it was a good first night. Light acknowledged happily, covering his face with his arm so he could let out a smirk.

~ ❶ ~

Light was once again visiting his dad’s office at the police station when it happened. He was waiting at the reception desk for them to get a call through to his dad. He honestly wasn’t surprised that his dad

wasn't easy to get ahold of these days, Light remembered him spending all of his time with L during the whole surveillance episode. It had been very quiet at the station lately so he didn't mind waiting.

Just as the officer behind the desk got a call from his father, Light heard the door swing open. *Hm? Someone's here?* Light thought with some surprise. He hadn't seen another person so much as walk through the room since he got there about fifteen minutes ago. Unconsciously, Light turned towards the door to see if it was someone he knew.

Light blinked in confusion when he saw them and two words slipped through his lips, "A teenager?"

Chapter End Notes

L is most definitely biased in his beliefs regarding the case. It's reasonable to think that Kira is involved since Raye was investigating when he was kidnapped, but what L isn't saying is that he doesn't want this to be unrelated to Kira. Just like how in canon he admits to unconsciously wanting Light to be Kira, here he doesn't seem to realize that he wants both Light to be Kira and for Kira to be to blame for this kidnapping. He wants it, so he's being stubborn. Light knows that about him, though.

As God as my witness, I hope that the next chapter is the last one before L and Light meet. I've been meaning to get to their meeting for a few chapters now and I wanna see it happen! If I can do that, then I can dedicate basically the entirety of the following chapter to their meeting. Wish me luck.

Case Concluded

Chapter Summary

> The case reaches its conclusion and some people are happier about it than others.

Chapter Notes

> It's been a flaming minute since I uploaded, but I was working on this pretty much the entire time. I also happened to have Finals, my birthday, and Covid in the meantime, so…yeah, the chapter was slow-going. 😓 Also, over 8000 words!! I know from your comments that you guys are really looking forward to reading L's and Soichiro's reactions and I had fun writing it, so here you go! I thought this chapter worked best by switching POVs like a puzzle coming together piece-by-piece.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

L and Soichiro continued to watch as he watched episode after episode of Boys Over Flowers. L couldn't help becoming slightly intrigued by this behavior as it drew closer and closer to dinner time and Light had barely done a thing but stare at the TV. "Your son has been home for several hours now and hasn't done any additional study or schoolwork. Is this normal for him?" L inquired.

The detective had been prepared for anything in his observations, of course. The whole point of said observation was to get a base idea of who Light Yagami was, after all. Before setting up the cameras, all he knew about Light was his class records and what other people had told him. However, the average individual is appallingly unobservant and mindless. Their comments will undoubtedly be lacking in insight and many will just be wrong.

Especially if Light was as good at acting as L assumed him to be. He could take very little that was commonly said about Light as truth, only use it to corroborate what he himself observed. Naomi Misora was the person he trusted most to pick up on details about Light that other people missed but even still, Light Yagami was someone he needed to see for himself.

“I…can’t say,” Soichiro replied to L’s question, surprise still evident in his voice and his eyes pasted on the screen. “Light does stay in his room most of the time and I try not to bother him, so I don’t know exactly what he does in there…I always assumed he just studied. I didn’t…” Soichiro stopped himself here and cleared his throat. “I’m barely ever home these days, he could have gained some interests since I’ve last been reliably at home.”

Could one of those new interests be murder? L pondered with some good humor. He detected a bit of guilt and a smidge of worry in the Chief’s demeanor. The man struck L as one of those individuals who wanted things to be a certain way and felt uneasy when they were not so. Given how Soichiro followed L dutifully even when the other investigators chafed at his orders, L did not think the elder Yagami was someone who needed to always be in control, per se, but he perhaps had an idea of the way things *should be* and felt it keenly.

L didn’t press for anything else and turned his attention back to the cameras. He’d been unable to think of any shrouded messages or hidden meaning to the shows Light was watching. Could it be that the boy was simply watching a TV show that he liked? Despite the fact that this particular show was more popular with preteen girls then boys about to graduate high school (and the police chief’s son, on top of that), it wasn’t anything truly strange for a normal person. However, was Light a normal person? Was it really as innocent as all that? He didn’t come to any answers by the time Light got up to have dinner.

Light had failed to turn on the news or go on his computer at any point and L couldn't tell if Light was making a point of not looking or if this was normal for him. Frustratingly, if not unsurprisingly, Soichiro Yagami was of little help in establishing a baseline for how each of the family members tended to act.

Not for the first time, L wished that Kira had a more fast-paced style of killing because as it was, there would likely be no kills for a while

and that would make it hard to tell if the surveillance of the Yagami household was having any effect on Kira's rate of killing. Kira usually went weeks, sometimes even months, without committing a single kill. At least, a kill that they could trace back to them, since Kira's special abilities muddied the waters somewhat.

L calmly watched the family eat their dinner and talk, bored out of his mind. It was all incredibly domestic and common. Nothing even slightly interesting. He caught Soichiro looking longingly at the picture the small family made but decided to be kind and not comment on it. He was more interested in seeing Light's reaction to the news report, anyway. How would Light react to his concession?

After he'd ascertained that he wouldn't get any useful information out of the family's ramblings, he told Watari to pull the trigger on the news story. The reporter was successful in getting the family's attention with the limited amount of information he'd been willing to disclose, but L's attention was firmly on one member, in particular.

What L wasn't prepared for was the unmitigated joy that overtook the young man's face as he realized what was happening. L was completely dumbfounded at the pure excitement that was nearly radiating through the screen. He'd gone through several possibilities in his head, but he hadn't expected this sort of reaction. Feigned disinterest or smug satisfaction seemed the most likely candidates.

Instead, the boy seemed almost like an overgrown puppy when he looked like that, rather than the restrained and studious student that all the photos of him seemed to portray. He had a wide smile on his face as he watched the news announcement that somehow managed to look both excited and fond, of what, he couldn't be sure. L thought that that smile really brought out the softness of the boy's face.

Was it possible this was an act? Could he truly be that excellent an actor?

The night soon began to wind down and the family finished up their dinner one by one. The television channel was eventually changed to something else and it looked like nothing was going to happen until the family broke up for the evening, but the detective tuned back in when Light took an interest in whatever show his sister was watching. Some kind of romantic drama with a popular actor as the male lead. L did start to pay more attention at this point even as it mostly came across as Light connecting with his sister over a common interest and he didn't think that it would prove to be anything useful.

Light Yagami is infatuated with someone? L heard but easily breezed past the partial admission that Light was partial to the male gender, merely adding it to his mental files on the boy as he waited to see if Light would name the individual. Someone who went to his college, perhaps? L wasn't sure if the information would prove useful in the investigation but if they came to a point where they might have to use this individual to lure Kira into a trap–

That was until Light said…

"What?!" Soichiro Yagami yelled at the top of his lungs, jumping up from his seat and slamming both his hands on the table in front of him. L didn't flinch at the outburst. Normally, this would have been because of his lack of strong external reactions or from years of being desensitized to violent outbursts in his line of work, but this time, it was because he couldn't move. His entire body felt frozen. His eyes widening into saucers.

What did Light Yagami just say…? Light said something else and headed back upstairs, but what was said went right over L's head. For once, he wasn't paying attention to what he was seeing. Being frozen was the only reason he was even still watching the screen to know that Light had left. He felt more numb than usual.

Did Light Yagami really just admit to having a crush on L himself? What were the chances of it and how was it even possible; Light himself admitted to the fact that he'd never met L in person and had little than snippets of information from his father and L's reputation to go on. Was this just a teenagers shallow interest in something mysterious mixed with a boy's libido? But still, what on *Earth* possessed him to think that L should be his target of affection. And what did it say that L's main suspect for Kira has now admitted to having a crush on the Detective L?

L's mind was whirling like a tornado, ideas getting tossed in, around, and then discarded as he quickly tried to make sense of what the surveillance situation had spiraled into.

Did this mean that he was wrong and Light wasn't Kira? Would Kira really become a serial killer if he had a crush on a detective? If true, that didn't make any sense. Most would try to impress their crushes not lay waste to the criminal population…then again, in Kira's twisted mind, maybe that course of action made sense. Maybe they thought that, since L was a man of the law, they would be helping him by killing off criminals. Could that be it? Could Kira's rampage really come down to Kira being a teenager intent on impressing their object of affection who happened to work with law enforcement? Then again, that was assuming Light's statement was truthful, which it may not have been.

More than anything, L was struck by the timeliness of this admission. For Light to have a crush on L after the Kira investigation in which L is heavily involved already started and to admit to such in his own home during the time period shortly after the cameras were introduced to his home was…suspicious, to say the least. If accidental, it was indeed unlucky that Light would admit to such a thing when he did. However, if it was by design…

"What is Light saying!" Soichiro continued to bark. It was a rather useless thing to be doing, but it did urge L to pull himself back from his stupefaction.

“Yes, what *is* Light saying?” L muttered under his breath. His words caused Soichiro to whirl on him.

“What’s going on? Why is my son saying these things?” Soichiro was still yelling, irrationally angry over what they had both heard.

Before L could respond, his cell phone on the desk rang and L swiped his hand out to pick it up. He knew what this was about. He held up a finger to the officer, silently telling him to wait, and took the call. “L?” Watari’s voice came through clearly. “I hear yelling coming from your room, do you need me to step in?” L knew from experience that the man was waiting for the slightest sign that L needed him and could burst into the room within two seconds.

“That won’t be necessary, Watari.” L answered promptly, casting a glance at Soichiro. “We’ve merely just received some alarming information and Mr. Yagami is taking it poorly. I don’t believe he will resort to violence, so your presence is not needed.”

“If you say so, then I will continue waiting on standby.” Watari’s response was short and simple.

“Thank you, Watari.” L hung up and turned his full attention back to Light’s father. The man’s anger had cooled upon hearing L’s short conversation with Watari. *It’s likely brought to his attention how hostile he was behaving.* It probably only elicited so much emotion from the man because the person at the center of it was his son.

“Have you calmed down now, Mr. Yagami?” L inquired, putting the phone down.

“Yes…yes. I apologize for my behavior, Ryuzaki. I don’t know what came over me.” Soichiro admitted, still sounding upset but at least he was more under control now.

“Perfectly understandable.” L replied, honestly. He dismissed the man as the officer sat back down in his seat, nearly falling into it.

“Why did my son say he…felt that way about you?” Soichiro choked out, now staring at the cameras despondently. L himself turned to the cameras, looking for answers.

L thought that such a thing should be obvious to the average individual. If taken at face value, Light was admitting both to having a schoolboy crush on the detective next to him and being at least partially attracted to men, in general. He didn’t, however, think that saying such to the Japanese Chief of Police would make things better with the man at the moment. The implications, L was sure, was not lost on him, even if the man didn’t seem ready to face them head-on quite at this moment.

“There is every possibility he was lying, if he figured out that there were cameras in the house.” L offered and although it was primarily meant to ease the man, it wasn’t even a meaningless platitude but rather a continuation of his previous thoughts before he was interrupted. It was well within the realm of possibility that Light may have discovered the cameras and so decided to make a shocking statement in order to see if he could get a reaction. *But if true, what would he hope to gain?* L wondered to himself.

“How would he have found out about the cameras? We’ve been watching him the whole time, besides eating dinner he’s been doing nothing but watching TV. And that particular lie is…”

That was also true. The question of how Light found out would have

to be answered if he chose to believe it to be a lie. How would Light have found out about the cameras? L had actually expected Light to find at least a few of the cameras, which was an additional reason for him to add as many cameras as he did. The fact that Light hadn't found *any* and hadn't generally moved from his bed at all was an absolute surprise.

If Light was truly Kira and had managed to know there were hidden cameras throughout his room and some around the house without exploring any spaces, then the killer would be by far more powerful than anyone – including L – had imagined and L couldn't resign himself to such an idea. No matter how he looked at the situation, he just didn't understand it.

"You talk to your family about me?" L asked, recalling how Light had mentioned that fact, substantiated by Sayu Yagami. He hadn't been aware that he'd been mentioned in the Yagami household, at all. He turned to look at the Chief in curiosity.

"Not since the Kira Case started." Soichiro defended, proactively. He was still looking at L warily, as if the detective had stolen his son or something. L internally sighed, resigned to the dawning realization that the man may not relax around him for some time, his protectiveness over his son that he'd already shown only going to get worse.

This night's worth of surveillance alone was truly testing Soichiro Yagami's core beliefs about his son. Small behaviors, L knew, were indicative of larger disparities yet to be seen. The father had probably expected his son to go home and study all evening, bond with his family, and go to sleep early. Given Light's grades and the tests he would be facing before graduation, it was not a particularly unreasonable expectation. L himself was surprised by what he had learned this night, but it only served to prove to him that he was on the right track in suspecting Light. He gave off all the appearances of being a normal, studious young man and none of that had showed on the footage.

The Light they'd seen was different and yet it was only a snapshot.

"Regardless of when you did so, your children clearly remembered." L pointed out, harmlessly. "I doubt I need to say this, but please be sure not to mention me to your family again. Until then, we must be careful as we approach this newest…finding." L found himself unwillingly floundering on the last word. His own thoughts on the issue also needed to be worked through before the night was over.

L didn't know what to make of the situation and the possibilities that either Kira was even more powerful than L could have possibly expected or that Light didn't know about the surveillance and was telling the truth about his crush. L had been in many strange and dangerous situations in his life, but he had never been anyone's object of affection before.

L didn't flatter himself in thinking that Light's supposed affection would persist if he met the "Great "L, but it was still a staggering blow to his mental state. He needed to clear his mind on the subject and investigate it or he would be stuck with the disconcerted feeling he felt rising in his gut until he left Japan.

He caught the chief giving him the side-eye.

L let out a frustrated groan underneath his breath. This was going to be a very long night…

~ ❶ ~

Light tried not to stare at the teenager as they entered the police station. He quickly forced himself to look back towards the guy

behind the front desk and watched the teen from the corner of his eye. Ryuk's occasional observation was also helpful.

Light was aware that he himself was a teenage human at the moment, but he was older, nearly ready to enter college. This teenager was younger, just a few years older than Sayu, by the looks of it. He was visibly nervous, fidgeting with his hands and glancing uncertainly around the lobby without his gaze lingering on anything in particular. The name hovering above his head was Hinata Sato. He looked like he would bolt from the police station at any moment, but something was keeping him from doing it.

I wonder what exactly he's doing here? Light thought, continuing to watch the boy twitch. Young people were frankly very uncommon in the precinct. It was all older men for the most part and to his knowledge, Light was the only person his age that came in regularly. *Must have something to do with a case, maybe that's why he's so nervous.* Light had already dropped off his father's change of clothes – as if he didn't know his dad was at yet another hotel with L – but he lingered around the front desk and chatted with the man behind it to see what happened.

Hinata apparently made up his mind and squared his shoulders, marching away from the door and walking to where Light was. He didn't pay Light any attention though, instead focusing on the officer behind the desk.

"Um…Sir?" He spoke hesitantly.

The officer, who had glanced at the teen when he'd first come through the front door along with Light, now excused himself to Light and gave the other boy his full attention. "Yes, how can I help you?" The officer asked, perfectly polite.

"Um…" The boy glanced briefly at Light, probably a little uncomfortable with his presence, but he didn't mention it and his gaze returned to the officer. "I saw a news story about a missing person…a–and I think I have some information on it?"

At those words, something itched at the back of Light's mind. *It couldn't be, right..?* But even as he thought that, his attention shifted entirely to the younger teen.

The officer straightened up too, his expression turning from friendly and open to serious. "Could you give me some more details about the missing person? The JPD would be grateful for any information you think you have on the case."

The boy wrung his hands as he spoke. "It's…you know, that *guy* … Raye Penbar."

Light nearly jerked back when the boy spoke Raye's name, but he just barely managed to keep his body still. Ryuk, on the other hand, was cheering and doing summersaults in the air beside him.

The officer leaned forward slightly over the counter in excitement, but stayed professional. "Please tell me what you know about the situation, anything you can tell me would be helpful."

The boy nodded hesitantly, looking a little more sure of himself now. "Well…um…you see, the thing is that I think–no, I *know* that my dad is the one that kidnapped Mr. Penbar."

Light's mind came to a screeching halt. What? That…wasn't what he'd expected to hear. What he expected, he couldn't say.

"Excuse me for asking, but how do you know your father is involved?" The officer continued.

"Because…b–because I–" The boy stuttered and then gulped, taking in one more shuddering breath before plunging forward with all the determination of someone who couldn't turn back now. "It's because I helped him do it."

The officer stared at the boy with wide eyes for a handful of seconds before finally saying, "I think I need to make a call."

About a minute later, Chief Soichiro Yagami would startle L by shooting up from his seat and demanding to know what the hell happened into his phone.

~ ❹ ~

"So one more time." The interrogating officer said as L watched from the security feed in the room. “Why did you come forward about the abduction?”

“I…well, I felt bad. This whole situation is bigger than it was meant to be and it’s lasted way longer. This should’ve been over in a few *days* .” The teenager, Hinata Sato, answered.

The officer listened to something on the other end of his earpiece before speaking again.“Tell us what happened.”

“My dad…he’s a small-time criminal, he–he makes most of his money from targeting tourists and either robbing them or…holding them ransom for some money. He can get more money that way, but he

doesn't ask for more than most people can pay and so normally their friends or family just pay up and he let's them go on their way. No violence or anything!" The boy in the suspect's chair haltingly supplied the information.

"You mean, more violent than the crime already is." The officer pointed out tersely and, in L's opinion, needlessly.

The boy flinched but nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess."

"And that is why your father targeted the Agent?" The officer moved on.

"Yeah. It's easy to tell who does and doesn't live here, especially if they're American, and Dad tries to only take people who were with someone else, otherwise who'd pay the ransom? The guy brought his wife here with him so he qualified, she'd probably pay the money quick." The kid gave a dry laugh before sobering quickly and continuing. "The mark wasn't such an easy one this time, according to Dad. This guy was super wary, he said. Always looking around, aware of his surroundings…I guess if he's FBI that explains it."

"You gave the prior statement that you helped with the abduction. Is that correct?"

The boy shifted uncomfortably. "Yeah, I did…only a little bit! Because this guy was a little harder to sneak up on, Dad asked me to draw him into a trap. Dad dragged me out to watch his apartment and for some reason, he left for an early morning walk. Dad thought it was the perfect time, he couldn't waste that opportunity, so…" The boy shrugged, listlessly.

"And how exactly did the two of you lure him into a trap?" The officer

leaned forward, as did L.

"Well, I'm young, most people don't find me very imposing so they let their guard down. I approached the Agent and told him that my little sister needed help and I didn't have my phone with me. He was willing to help, so I led him to the park across the street and Dad jumped him." The boy shifted again. "He seemed like an okay guy, for what it's worth."

"So you're saying that Agent Penbar was kidnapped for ransom to his wife…why didn't we receive any ransom demands?" The officer asked.

"Well, we didn't know anything about who he was or what he was doing here!" The boy defended, growing a little panicked before forcibly calming himself down. "Dad only paid attention to certain things and kept a watch on the guy after he'd tagged him! Normally, Dad would get information like a name and a phone number to call after the abduction, but…the moment Dad started asking questions, he found the guy was a *government agent* and that he was involved in the Kira Case, of all things–!"

Here, both the officer and L stiffened, but the boy didn't notice and continued on his tirade. "Dad freaked out, he didn't want any part in that serious business, but he'd already made the mistake of kidnapping the guy and he didn't know what to do! I suggested dad just let the guy go and forget about the whole thing, but Dad never listens to me and he was afraid the guy would be able to track us down if he did. Dad came up with the idea of blaming Kira for it all by writing some letter demanding they call off the Kira investigation in return for the Agent's life and sending it to the investigators."

L was, at this point, clutching his microphone so tightly that his fingers began to bruise. Quickly, he lurched forward and muttered a question into it for the officer to ask.

“How did your father know where L was?” The officer repeated, verbatim.

“L?” The boy jerked violently, nothing but genuine shock on his face in response to the question. “What about L? Dad sent the letter to the hotel that he saw the Agent’s wife visiting. He started watching their rental place again after finding out he was an Agent working on the Kira case and figured the only reason she would go to some random place like that so soon after her husband’s disappearance was that she was being questioned by the FBI or by the Kira Investigators.”

The boy leaned forward across the table. ”Originally, he was going to send it to the police department but if he was right about the hotel, it would be a lot safer to hang out in the street in front of *that* without being noticed. If he was wrong, like the wife was meeting with a secret lover or something, then the hotel staff would probably notify the police anyway.” He shrugged. “Dad’s had more than one run-in with the police, so he understands that much. So Dad was thinking that he’d wait awhile after the letter and then let the Agent go and hope Kira would take the fall for the whole thing. Dad’s honestly pretty eager to toss the Agent out of our house and write it all off as a mistake from the start.”

L’s fingers clenched tightly around the microphone he was still holding onto, even as he muted it. This…this wasn’t what he wanted. When Chief Yagami had gotten a call saying that someone had come to the police station and confessed to being involved in the kidnapping of Agent Penber, he didn’t know what to make of it, even as he leapt to take control of the situation.

He honestly hadn’t expected anything to come of the press release, he knew that Kira wouldn’t be spooked by something so minimal and a call to the morality of a serial killer would amount to less than nothing. L quickly considered that Kira was controlling someone to take the fall for his crime or something of that vein…he would have to keep an eye out for if that person died in order to test it. He was

completely staggered by this development and he felt his temper rise as he processed the information.

If…if he were to believe *this* – what he was hearing – then Kira had nothing to do with any of it. Despite the fact that Agent Penber was *actively investigating for the Kira Case when he was abducted* , his abduction was arranged and carried out irrespective of that?!

L growled underneath his breath. Was he really supposed to believe that? That this, all of this, had absolutely nothing to do with Kira or the Kira Investigation and it was all coincidental? Yet even as he hated the idea, it made some kind of sense. He could admit that the person who wrote the letter was more hesitant and wary than he could comfortably assume Kira to be. Kira had never kidnapped anyone before, although that wasn't hard evidence against the fact that he could, and nothing had arisen after the letter was delivered.

The boy's narrative eerily fit into the evidence and that would be difficult for someone outside the investigation to make up. They'd need to follow up on whatever information the boy gave them, but… but if it proves to be true, then…

Then none of this had to do with *anything!*

"Um…L? Are you okay?" Matsuda hesitantly called out from behind him, causing L to realize that his growling had become audible to the other investigators who were in the room with him.

"If you would all please, I'd like to be left alone for the moment." L spoke quietly without looking at the other investigators, his hair hanging over his eyes.

"Hey, wait a–" Aizawa started, but stopped in response to his Chief

shaking his head and moving to step out of the room.

"We'll contact Ms. Misora and let her know we've found her fiance alive and well." The Chief announced solemnly to the room, clearly to allow L his moment of privacy.

The other investigators looked at each other in a confused silence before one-by-one moving to leave, with Matsuda hesitating the longest and shooting L a concerned look before he too left.

After being left alone in the room, a second passed in which you could hear a pin drop and then L was up and throwing his chair across the room.

Damn you.…damn you, Kira! L seethed in his mind, his chest rising and falling rapidly. This whole time, none of it mattered. Yes, they could get the Agent back, but they were no closer to Kira because Kira hadn't been involved in it at all! He suddenly felt so frustrated, so agitated. Could all of this really be a coincidence? It felt completely unbelievable…and yet he was beginning to feel backed into a corner where he would have no choice but to accept that it was so.

None of this had to do with *anything!*

This kind of ending made L feel robbed of any and all satisfaction, as if he hadn't solved the case at all. It was some stupid, petty little pickpocket and kidnapper.

He would have to talk to Watari later about making sure he wasn't followed like that again *and* they needed to follow up on whatever information the boy gave them in order to find Agent Penber, but at the moment, he was too seething with anger to do it.

He still didn't know how those idiots managed to follow Watari of all people, but dumb luck did favor the dumb. It seared him like acid to know that he was attributing intelligence and meaning to what was essentially dumb criminals being *lucky* . It shouldn't have been like this!!

Damn it.

~ ❶ ~

Light could hardly believe the turn this case had quickly taken. It answered all of his questions…perfectly, in fact, but…

Light couldn't follow the case in person after the officer called it in, but he had Ryuk for that and what the Shinigami had reported back was both surprising and satisfying. Light had known that he hadn't had anything to do with the kidnapping of Raye Penber but he had still wondered if it had something to do with the Kira investigation or Raye's job with the FBI, but to hear that it was neither–!

Well, it did explain everything, so Light was ready to wash his hands of the whole affair even as he prepared to continue keeping an eye on it to see how the situation developed.

As I thought, the world truly is chaotic to the point where trying to assign meaning to everything is pointless. Light concluded. *As annoying as all of this has been, life just likes throwing spanners into the works for no reason, I shouldn't be surprised.*

Ryuk appeared through a wall and flew down to land next to Light, who was lounging in the park across from the police station as he

thought. Ryuk had taken off a little bit ago after telling Light about what happened in the interrogation, they both thought he should check on the Investigators and what they were doing about the situation.

Looks like he's back, Light thought, composed. "Ryuk? What's happening?" He called out easily, already knowing that there was no one in the park to hear him.

Ryuk cackled as he floated upside down. Sometimes he enjoyed this even more than Light did! "L's freaking out."

"He must be…" Light muttered to himself. "If his reaction in the past when he was forced to admit that he *wanted* me to be Kira is any kind of a baseline, L's going to be furious! And for once, it's not my fault."

He was still wrapping his mind around what they'd found out, honestly. "Is that it?" Light inquired, thoughtfully.

“Nope!” Ryuk practically sang, swirling in the air. “After L stopped throwing things–” Noted. “He got the information about where Raye is and he’s mobilized the police to the location. He’s also sent a few officers to arrest the father and bring him in for questioning. Oh! And they made a call to Naomi and asked her to come down to the police station. That was the first thing they did though, so she’s probably–”

Light and Ryuk were jerked out of their conversation by someone huffing heavily and running down the street just in front of them. Light turned around instinctively to look at them and did a double take as he caught Naomi Misora running down the street to the police station, a terrified but also strangely hopeful expression on her face. Light launched himself up from the bench he was sitting on and sprinted towards the exit to the park, catching her just as she was about to pass it.

“Ms. Misora!” Light called out, excitedly.

The woman jerked to a stop and whirled around to face him. “Light!” She exclaimed, both her face and voice mirroring his own shock.

“Fancy seeing you here! I was just hanging out in the park! What’s the matter, what’s going on? You look scared.” Light painted a frightened look onto his face.

If Naomi would have hesitated to share information before, her previous acquaintance with Light and her heightened emotional state basically threw that out of the window. “I just got a call from the Task Force! They said that they have a lead on where Raye is and they’re following it right now! They haven’t found him yet, but they said they had reason to believe he was okay…” Here, she couldn’t help the smile spreading across her face and was obliged to bring her hands up to her face to try and hide it from view.

Light allowed his own genuine excitement to become visible and he grabbed her hands away from her face, holding them in his own. “That’s great! It’s amazing! You two will be together in no time, then!” If the person who kidnapped Raye really was that child’s father, then he’s probably been ignoring Raye almost entirely out of fear. The agent was probably fine!

“But…” Naomi’s voice jerked Light’s attention back. “What if he’s…” She didn’t need to finish, the kind of worry he could read clearly in her eyes said it all.

“Don’t say that, if the officers said that they have reason to believe he’s okay, then I’m sure it’s true.” Light decided to go the route of “blind faith in the law” as he comforted her. Light squeezed her hands

in a gesture of support and he could see it settled her a little. “They wouldn’t give you false hope like that if things looked dire and you can’t think like that. They’ll bring Raye back to you in no time, I’m sure of it.”

Naomi looked back at him with wide, glistening eyes before her lips spread into a soft, barely-there smile. “You’re right. I need to be strong and hold out hope that things’ll work out, especially now that they have a lead. Thank you, Light.” She sounded enormously grateful and it flooded Light’s chest with warmth.

This, Light found himself thinking. *This is the kind of quality relationship that I was missing in my past life.* “Hey, now.” Light grinned brightly, letting go of her hands. “Don’t forget that even if you were FBI, it’s okay to be weak sometimes. You’ve had to deal with so much lately… and I admire you for being able to handle it and take charge as you have. You don’t always have to put on a strong front, remember.”

“I’ll remember.” Naomi smiled a little wider at that.

Light bit his lip as he contemplating something for a microsecond before lobbing an offer at her. “You know, if you need some support, I could accompany you to the police station. I was just there dropping something off for Dad and I wouldn’t mind hanging out for a while longer while you wait.” He made sure that his tone was very decisive, just to help convince her that he really didn’t mind doing it. He absolutely didn’t want her to turn him down on this.

Naomi responded almost immediately. “Really? That would be great. Honestly, I think I would be eaten up by anxiety on my own…” She admitted.

“Then it’s a good thing I’m here.” Light declared with good humor and linked their arms, gently pulling her towards the police station at a

more sedate pace than she'd started.

Naomi actually let out a small laugh in response and let him lead her, looking so much more at peace than she had a minute earlier.

The receptionist at the station was surprised to see Light again but Light merely greeted him with a nod, prioritizing Naomi. He shepherded her over to one wall that had a row of chairs and they seated them both their to wait. They were strategically seated to be facing the entrance to the station, the front desk, and the doorway to the back of the station. Naomi clearly realized this and she appeared appreciative of it. As time passed though, she grew fidgety and Light reached out to hold her hand again.

Light didn't know how long they sat there waiting and holding hands, with even Ryuk being silent, but he definitely noticed when his father and a few other investigators that Light recognized from the Task Force blew in through the front door with a man they both *definitely* recognized in the center of them.

"Raye!" Naomi burst out in joy, jumping up from her seat and running at him.

The investigators and especially Agent Penber jolted at her exclamation, but Penber's expression lightened upon seeing her and he lurched forward too, opening his arms in invitation. "Naomi, you're okay!"

The two met in the middle and the agent hugged his fiance to his chest as she wrapped her arms around his waist. The two buried themselves in each other and both Light and the police force watched it with a smile on their faces. Sadly, his dad eventually glanced away from the couple and noticed Light was there.

“Light! What are you *doing* here?” Soichiro exclaimed loudly in shock, stepping away from the group and coming over to him. Light stood up to greet him.

“I was dropping off some stuff for you, you’ve been away from home for so long…” Light excused, forcing himself to look bashful. “As I was leaving, I ran into Naomi and she told me what was going on. I was worried about her, so I offered to accompany her and she accepted. I see everything worked out okay.” Light nodded towards the embracing couple.

Soichiro’s expression looked deeply comfortable and conflicted and Light thought he knew why. Light hadn’t done anything wrong, his behavior was both innocent and acceptable, but his father was nonetheless disconcerted with his presence because his continued presence in the middle of the investigation was adding fuel to L’s fire. His dad was going to have to report to L, once again, that Light had shown up in the middle of everything and subsequently endure L’s – in his father’s mind, unwarranted – suspicions.

Naturally, as both a police chief and a father, he would’ve preferred it if Light had stayed out of the situation, but with the way that Light relayed the happenings of the day, Light’s behavior didn’t come across as sticking his nose into police business so he couldn’t be reprimanded for it. After a moment of watching his father think, wherein his thoughts were pretty much written across his face, Soichiro replied.

“Well, now that the situation’s being wrapped up, I’d appreciate it if you went home and got some rest.” Soichiro was clearly trying to get rid of him, but Light couldn’t pinpoint the main reason for it. Light did know that his performance a few days ago and his admission that he had a crush on L and he could tell that his father was having trouble knowing how to interact with him, even during this short conversation. Then again, it was the first time they’d seen each other since the surveillance started, so…

Then again, Light knew that despite the fact that he'd helped on cases before and his dad did ultimately expect him to follow in his footsteps in the police department, the man still liked to keep his family, including Light, far away from his job to protect them. This trying to shuffle him out of the line of fire wasn't anything out of the ordinary for him from that perspective.

A cell phone ringing drew both sets of eyes back to Naomi and Raye, the first of which hesitantly pulled away from her fiance to answer the phone. "Hello?" Her look of confusion at who was calling quickly turned into realization after she listened to the other person. "Yes. Yes, okay, Raye and I will be out front. You'll send a car around? Alright." She hung up and turned to Raye. Light and his father paced closer to the two, Light's ears having pricked up at the mention of someone (he thought he knew who) sending a car around.

"L wants to talk with us immediately. He said he'll send a car around." Naomi said to Raye.

"L?" Raye repeated, his eyes wide in surprise. *That's right,* Light reminded himself. *Raye never met L and he was never supposed to. No wonder he looks a little starstruck, he's about to meet the famous detective himself. Something he wouldn't have been allowed to do if his kidnapping wasn't the catalyst for this whole debacle.*

"Do you think you're ready for that? Do you need to see a doctor?" She checked.

Raye nodded solidly, giving her a reassuring smile. "Don't worry about that, I'm okay. We can have a quick checkup afterwards, so we better go." Naomi shot both Light and Soichiro a questioning glance.

“Go ahead, our guys will be right behind you.” Soichiro assured. Light gave her an encouraging nod and a smile of his own. She smiled at him once more before turning and heading towards the door with her fiance, who had his arms wrapped around her as they went.

Light considered sending Ryuk to spy on them, but figured that the Shinigami had done enough for the day. Since he was in a good mood with the case’s conclusion and Raye’s safe return, he could let this go. Light glanced back at them as they left. *I wonder what they’re going to be talking about?*

~ ❶ ~

Naomi was currently arguing with L about Light, being backed up by Soichiro and Matsuda.

“Why *can’t* you drop the surveillance?” Naomi demanded, in response to something L had said. “All of the testimonies, including the one Raye just gave, indicates that the culprit wasn’t Kira, so there’s no reason to keep Light under watch. Whether you’re convinced that Light isn’t Kira or not, it’s clear he wasn’t involved in any way. All he’s done is help!”

“I disagree.” L calmly refuted. “Whether or not I’m convinced Light is Kira is exactly the issue with the video cameras.I agree that it doesn’t seem as if Light was responsible for this particular crime. However, that doesn’t mean that we should give up on observing him so soon.”

“L, come on, this is crazy!” Matsuda insisted, leaning forward as he implored the detective. “Light isn’t Kira, there’s no way! Besides, it’s a massive invasion of privacy and we’ve already gotten Ms. Misora’s fiance back!”

The man in question was in another room at the moment, getting an initial health check by Watari after giving his side of what happened. He'd had unfortunately little to add. After being kidnapped – or rather, after waking up blindfolded and tied up in a strange place – Raye had assumed that it was in relation to the Kira Case and so he had inadvertently outed himself as a member of the FBI. The criminal had been too skittish after that to say or do anything around him, basically avoiding him like the plague besides taking care of his basic needs.

Honestly, he was embarrassed more than anything that as an FBI agent, he was caught off guard so easily by a low-level criminal acting alone.

"I have no way of knowing what Light is or is not, right now. All we know for sure is that he's mysteriously shown up multiple times in the investigation. And while I'm happy that Agent Penber is back with his fiance, that is not my larger concern. Finding and stopping Kira is." L stated, simply.

"L," Soichiro interjected, solemnly. "What have we learned from the surveillance we've already done on my son and my family, in general?"

L turned his back on the group as he hummed thoughtfully. "In the last several nights since we've installed cameras in the Yagami household, our surveillance has revealed…nothing. The Yagami household seems very innocent and Light Yagami, in particular, has done nothing suspicious."

"So then why do you keep refusing to drop it already?" Naomi asked, but she seemed to know what his answer would be. "It's gone far enough."

“Kira kills at a slow rate and their kills aren’t consistently paced.” L noted for the others in the room. “It may take some time before we can come to the conclusion that Light is innocent in the killings. A few nights simply won’t do. The end of the kidnapping case doesn’t change that.”

“Isn’t there something we can do to clear Light faster, then?” Matsuda practically begged.

L froze. Then, slowly, he turned to face Matsuda who began to look nervous. “That’s a good suggestion, Mr. Matsuda. There may be something that might help clear Light and get the cameras out of the Yagami household quicker.” His spoke, his tone very low.

“And…what would that be?” Matsuda hesitantly asked. The others leaned forward in anticipation of what the lead detective was going to say.

“I think there is no better time for me to take a more hands-on role in evaluating Light Yagami’s innocence.” L mulled it over, aloud. “I think it’s time for me to meet Light for myself.”

~ Ⓚ ~

With everything going on the last week or so, his college entrance exams really snuck up on him. He’d barely remembered that they were even happening! But here he was, taking the written exam. Light had been one of the last to show up, but he hadn’t seen L. Then again, there was an empty seat somewhere behind him, so there was still a chance.

It wasn’t a big deal, Light told himself, if L doesn’t show up and pretend to be a college student the way he had before. It was just…

Light would admit that he really wanted to see L. Despite the fact that the detective was *alive again,* it had been an unbelievable amount of time since Light had seen him, with both of his human lives and his time as a Shinigami combined.

He *really* wanted to see L.

At first, Light had resolved to keep an eye out in case L came in, but he accidentally got too engrossed in the test. He quickly made a game of seeing how quickly he could complete it. Light had studied his heart out for it in his previous life, afraid of even the *possibility* of not living up to expectations by not getting the top grade out of all the applicants, but he was the possessor of an excellent memory. In his mind, he'd already studied for the test, gone through and completed college, and gained years of experience working with the police.

He hadn't needed to open a book this time and he was flying through the test.

"You there!" Light jerked, but the proctor wasn't talking to him. "Student number 162, sit properly in your chair!"

Light's heart skipped a beat at those words. He couldn't have remembered the exact wording of the order he'd heard all those years ago, but…but that was definitely–! Light turned around in his chair fast enough to hear something crack, but he paid it no mind. His attention was completely, entirely engrossed by the achingly familiar form hunched on a seat a few desks behind him.

And Light gave the most *brilliant* smile.

Chapter End Notes

> And the surveillance doesn't stop! Not when it canonically does, anyway. Which you can attribute to Kira's slower rate of killing

that’s harder to track in a single night’s surveillance combined with L’s frustration at how the mini case ended.
A lot happened in this chapter! You got an extra long one because there were several things I was DETERMINED to get in here.
Hope you guys like how the mini case (and the chapter) ended! I loved seeing you guys theorizing about it and I hope no one's disappointed with it. I always intended to have the kidnapping be random chance rather than being involved with Kira in any way; part of that whole "the world is a chaotic place where shit just happens" theme I've got going.

"First" Meetings

Chapter Summary

> Light with hearts in his eyes and L with question marks above his head~

Chapter Notes

> My biggest task when writing L from Light's POV is giving the reader enough information on L's emotions without many outward signs. Utilizing Light, who knows L well, and very small visual cues once in a while seems to be the way to go. We get the best look at L in his POV but I didn't want L to be a complete blank slate otherwise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yes, yes…yes! Light chanted in his mind as he saw the hunched form behind him. L really never disappointed him. *It figures. Through everything, he was the one person who never left me alone, who never abandoned me. Even after he died, the things he'd done in his life still came back to haunt me.*

L was unmistakable in appearance, as if Light couldn't remember every single detail like he had only seen him yesterday. That black hair that looked like he hadn't brushed it in days, the eye bags that looked bigger than most race tracks, and his skin that was pale like paper. He was crouching on his seat behind his desk like a gargoyle and that particular comparison would've brought a smile to his lips if Light wasn't already smiling.

The only thing that surprised Light and nearly made him do a double-take was the name hovering over L's head. He honestly hadn't given it a single thought, but he could know L's real name now. He'd never found it out in his past life, not even once L was dead. Back then, he'd thought he had better things to deal with. His *legacy* .

As if any imagined legacy was better than the man he'd sacrificed in

the pursuit of it.

Honestly, he'd been pretty determined not to think about L most of the time after his death back then. It was easier to convince himself that he was happy about his rival's death if he didn't think about it too hard. To attribute the hysterics that he'd fly into whenever he was alone shortly afterwards to over-the-top glee at his victory. Even calling himself L…in his head, he'd thought it was his private way of gloating…but maybe he was just trying to keep a part of L alive and had neither the strength nor the maturity to admit it to himself. Of course, that was before he knew the man had successors. It only occurred to him now how much he'd avoided reminders of the man until his own legacy, his successors, turned up.

But really? *L Lawliet?* He could hear Ryuk cackling next to him. His friend knew exactly what he was thinking. Light could hardly believe that it was really that straightforward! Fair enough, the last name was decently normal, but how did someone actually have a single letter for a first name? How! Were his parents on drugs? Light knew that only a person's true name could be used in the Death Note and hover above their heads, not assumed names, so what the absolute hell!

Ignoring that for the moment, Light really was happy to see him. Maybe a bit too happy, he realized as Ryuk snapped his fingers directly in front of Light's face, startling him out of his unintentional staring contest with L. And it *was* a staring contest because there L was, staring right back at him unblinkingly as if Light's staring was perfectly normal.

Then again, L's features were notoriously hard to read. He processed things mostly internally, although Light had gotten quite good at noticing when some things slipped out.

"And you, number 727, face straight." The proctor ordered Light, jolting the young man once again. Reluctantly, Light forced himself to face forward without looking back at L. He realized how suspicious he

was probably being and looking back at the other man would seriously risk Light getting lost in him again.

Not that turning back to his work saved Light from getting lost in his own head. As Light filled out the questions on his exam, he thought about the person just a few seats behind him, becoming jittery in anticipation as he did. How could he not think about it? The man himself was only a couple feet away from him, likely paying some attention to Light even as he filled out his own test.

Light was so nervous and excited at finally being with L that he had to stop his hand from shaking several times as he continued writing. His heart pounded in his chest, like it was trying to break free.

When Light was done, he checked his answers just to be safe. He already knew that L would get 100% on all his exams that day and Light wasn't about to give up the chance to impress him by getting anything less than that. Light got up and handed in his test, the first one done. *Finally.* It has been the longest test of his life and he knew who was to blame for that.

Speaking of, Light heard someone getting up from their seat as he made his way to the door. He had his suspicions about who it was but he still checked by turning his head just enough for him to catch sight of the person out of the corner of his eye. Yep, it was L.

The detective in question had barely waited a second after Light finished before turning in his own exam and he figured that it was basically a given that L had been done since at least the time that Light finished, if not earlier, and he'd just waited until his suspect was leaving to leave himself.

He waited for me. Light knew the practicality underlying the decision, but he still couldn't help the flutter in his chest and the flush of pride

he felt that L had *waited for him* .

Was he going to approach him in the hallway? Was he going to approach him *at all?* Last time…he hadn't, right? Yes, Light remembered distinctly that the induction ceremony was the first time he'd spoken to L. Light felt his heart ache at the thought of that. This was the moment he'd been hoping for for what felt like forever, could he just let it go with one long look between the two of them and that's it?

…of course not.

Light hung around in the hallway a little away from the door to the testing room and laid in wait. They'd have to move from the hall later when the rest of the examinees started finishing, but for now he figured they had time. That was, if he was successful in engaging L in conversation, but he had absolute confidence that he could do it, no problem.

Given that he didn't engage Light directly during this encounter in the previous timeline, his goals for the initial meeting was probably just to observe Light in person and gather intel on him. It seemed telling that he never talked to Light until the second meeting but continued to stare at him relentlessly, perhaps through the entire test. Yep, definitely an info gathering mission only.

Well, that was about to change.

Light leaned against the wall in the hall and started counting in his head as he waited for L to make his appearance. Ten seconds later, the door to the room opened and closed and out came the man in question. L was as casual as ever when closing the door behind him, as if he wasn't following a lead on a serial killer investigation. That ended real quickly though as his hunched form turned to leave and L

found himself facing Light, albeit the brunette was several feet away from him and still leaning up against the wall.

The man *froze* , went still like a cat, and his perpetually wide eyes blinked several times at the unexpected sight. Light could almost see the question "what is Light Yagami still doing here?" written all over his face. Of course, the detective adjusted quickly, Light noted with admiration. L's expression shuttered a bit and he started heading down the hallway, this time his casualness seemed more affected than otherwise.

It seemed like he was going to walk right past Light as if they were perfect strangers and just leave, but he wasn't about to just let that happen.

"Hi!" Light gave a bright smile to the detective and waved him over.

L's eyes flicked back to Light like a switch. He looked at Light as a few long seconds *dragged* by, but Light was used to the man's awkward silences by now and didn't show any reaction as he waited, smiling.

"Hello." L replied simply, stopping shortly in front of him.

Light's breath caught in his throat. It occurred to him only now that this was the first time he'd heard L's voice in years, unmolested by a voice changer, and it reverberated down his body and into his soul.

Light was pretty sure his pupils dilated.

"So you finished early too, huh?" Light tried for a companionable laugh, but he detected a breathy note there that he hadn't intended.

Very small, but as expected, the slight furrowing of L's eyebrows indicated he'd noticed.

L was looking at Light curiously and, Light thought, with a small amount of surprise. L was one of those curious people whose emotions were difficult to read simply by looking at their face, but he considered "L reading" to be a skill that could be learned.

“Yes…” L droned, peering up at Light from underneath his bangs with precision. “Well, sadly it seems I wasn’t the first one done, but oh well.” Something pricked at the back of Light’s mind as L finished his statement and he felt a rush of excitement.

This was what L did, he’d almost forgotten in the heat of the moment! L often wrapped seemingly innocuous sentences in double or even triple meanings and Light would respond in kind, creating a war of words. Sometimes Light read his meaning loud and clear while other times he realized there could be multiple intentions with one line and he couldn’t pin down which was intended! It was delightful.

In this case, Light thought he could pick up on two different intentions. One, L was trying to get him to lower his guard a little with the implication that Light was smarter than L and therefore didn’t need to see L as a threat. Two, it could be meant to keep him on his toes just a little since it brought more attention to the fact that L was behind Light by only a bit…too close for comfort, if Light was the sort of person who needed to be the one on top. Light chuckled, inwardly. This was going to be a fun reunion.

Light gave a bright and friendly smile, not needing to fake it in the least when L was in front of him. “Don’t say that! I’m sure you could’ve finished much earlier if that proctor guy wasn’t bugging you. I’m not surprised you finished after me with him distracting you like that. I’m sure you would’ve finished first otherwise.” The brunette reassured. His almost concrete suspicions about L actually having finished first and waiting for Light to finish aside, he didn’t think L

needed any cheering up, but it wouldn't do to act like the elitist person L might still be expecting.

Ryuk's spying could only reveal so much about what L expected Light to be. The Shinigami couldn't read minds and L was hardly honest with the other investigators about all of his thoughts.

Light caught the slight widening of L's eyes before his face straightened out again, the only indication of surprise but a significant one. "Thank you for saying so. You're really too humble though. You beat me, fair and square." *L is such a fucking liar,* Light thought fondly. "Is that why you wanted to talk to me?" L inquired, taking the initiative.

And straight for the jugular, as always. "No, it actually wasn't. I just couldn't come up with anything else to start a conversation with you." Light smiled weakly and rubbed the back of his head in affected embarrassment.

"Oh? Why, then, did you want to talk to me?" L prompted. His desire to know was palpable.

"Well…" Light drew off, then restarted. "It's hard to say exactly, something about you just struck me. I felt like I *needed* to talk to you. Pretty stupid, huh?"

L was silent for an awkward amount of time, probably wrapping his mind around Light's statement. Light basically told him nothing but at the same time, he was making a somewhat romantic claim to feeling a connection to him. It's probably a lot of unknown to process.

"I don't think it's stupid at all to rely on your instincts." L finally admitted.

"Really?" Light asked, beaming.

"Of course. Our instincts often tell us things we're not ready to understand on our own. I wonder what yours are telling you?" He pondered, aloud.

That question did unfair things to Light's heart when spoken in L's low tone. "Who can say?" Light returned, shakily. He jolted as he suddenly realized something. "Oh hey, I didn't mean to be rude. I just realized that I never introduced myself. I promise I'm not normally like this… my name is Light, Light Yagami." Light held out his hand for L to shake.

L shook his hand easily enough, his grip very strong. "Hideki Ryuga."

Light was half-surprised when L didn't wipe his hand after shaking Light's, like he did shortly after they'd first met in the other timeline. Guess he didn't come prepared for it this day. It went along with a suspicion he'd always had, even back in that life. L had basically never shown himself to have a strong issue with germs except for that one time and the way he'd chosen to do it made Light think that it had been one of his many plots to try and unnerve Light to see how he'd react.

" *Hideki Ryuga?* " Light gave the expected response, shock evident. "The same as that pop idol?"

It was no wonder L used the same alias as before. The real Ryuga was popular at this time, very visible in the public eye, and more than that, L knows through his surveillance that Light saw Ryuga on TV and commented on his appearance so Light would definitely know him.

"Yes, I get that a lot." L droned as if he actually had. *I'll bet you do,* Light scoffed mentally. "We do share the same name but as you can see, I'm not him."

"Clearly." Light agreed readily. "Unfortunate though, to share a name with a public figure like that." It would be cute if L took that as a passive aggressive comment from Kira about the power of knowing someone's name, but Light was actually just making small talk.

"Are you a fan?" L asked.

"Of Hideki Ryuga?" Light blinked in surprise.

"Yes." L confirmed. "I assure you that I won't look down on you if you like things such as pop idols, even if their target demographic is preteen girls. I myself like k-pop magazines." He made the admission as if it meant nothing and to him, it probably did.

"Well, not really. My sister likes him, but I'm not really a fan of all the melodrama. He plays a lot of roles where he takes himself a bit too seriously for me to enjoy. You know, that's actually going to be a little awkward. Talking about him while using *your* name…" Light drew off with a laugh.

L hummed, thoughtfully. "Well, you could always just call me Hideki. Shortening it a bit might help."

Light smiled wider at the offer, surprised by it. "Thanks! I'll do that. And you can call me Light! So you like k-pop?" Light was momentarily distracted by the sound of multiple bodies shuffling inside the testing room. "I think the others are finishing up. Should we move elsewhere

to continue?" Light asked, leadingly. He knew L wouldn't hesitate to turn him down if the man wanted to, but he was hoping some persistence and L's curiosity could make up the difference.

"I really have to be going soon, I've made other arrangements." L responded, calmly.

"Is that so? But you finished early." Light pointed out.

"I was expecting that." L assured him, but Light wasn't going down without a fight.

"Are you sure you can't spare just a few more minutes or maybe a half hour?" Light couldn't care less how desperate he was sounding. "It seems like such a waste of the day not to get to know each other a little better. Especially since we're probably going to make the Freshman Address together."

"Freshman Address?" L asked.

"Yeah. It's this thing that higher-end colleges like To-Oh do during their freshman orientation. They have the top scorer among the incoming students read a speech, but you know, I expect to get 100% in all subjects. Considering how fast you finished, you might've too and if that's the case…"

"The academy will likely ask us to make the speech together." L said thoughtfully, finishing for him.

Light nodded, excitedly. "It'd be a shame to not get to know each other beforehand if we're going to be side-by-side up there in front of the whole school. So what do you say, do you have thirty minutes?"

L peered up at Light thoughtfully for several long seconds, mulling it over, before he gave a slight nod of assent. “I suppose you are right about that, although your confidence in me might prove to be misplaced.”

“I doubt that.” Light waved it off.

“I’m not the most social individual, but I suppose that I could spare a bit of my time. Would you mind if I made a call to my ride first to let them know I’ll be late?” L continued.

“Sure thing, I’ll just step outside and wait for you there.” Light waved and turned to walk away.

“Alright. I’ll be there in a minute.” L said behind him and Light headed outside. Light had to fight down the worry that L would try to sneak off when he wasn’t around. He didn’t think L was actually going to pull something like that, all Light had to do was wait like he said he would.

He wasn’t going to let the detective go that easily.

~ ❶ ~

L didn’t understand. He just didn’t understand.

None of this made any sense to him.

This wasn't how it was meant to go.

He'd never intended to engage with the suspect during this initial encounter, really. The plan had only ever been to watch Light, his behavior, and take mental notes. He'd finished his test before Light had, but he'd sat there in his seat as if he hadn't so that he could continue observing the young man. Of special interest was exactly how long it would take Light to finish.

One test wasn't definitive, but it would give an idea of his intellectual capabilities. L had access to his grades and entire academic record, but that was a more removed line of inquiry while this was a live demonstration.

Light had done little to no studying that L could see with his surveillance cameras, so how quickly he finished his test, along with his final grade on it, would likely represent his intelligence and raw knowledge base rather than his ability to cram (unlike multiple individuals that L could point out in their testing room).

L found himself pleased with the time Light took to finish, it did indicate that he was quite intelligent, but when L exited the testing room, he came face-to-face with a certain Light Yagami who was waiting for him and what followed made him even more aware of something. Light was…different than L had suspected. L could admit, if only privately to himself, that both Kira and Light weren’t acting the way he thought they would.

First, Kira. His initial profiling of the killer after he’d ascertained that the seemingly random deaths were all done by one person was that Kira was both idealistic and arrogant. The deaths of only serious criminals indicated that there was some moral judgment being cast on those people, a vision that was being worked towards.

Of course, it was also idealistic to think that a perfect world could be achieved, no matter how many criminals one killed. The world would never be perfect and most people's hard work and effort to improve it, like that of police officers, came to nothing. Only truly young people usually went out into the world filled to the brim with passion to change the world. The fact that only criminals were dying supported this version of Kira, someone with seemingly supernatural powers who thought that they could change the world.

But then there were the additional facts that the person was killing at all and that Kira was mostly using heart attacks. L knew by now that it was possible that Kira could kill in ways other than heart attacks, so the fact that the vast majority of criminals were killed using that method was telling. It wasn't due to laziness or a lack of creativity, that much was clear from how Kira had conducted himself so far. No, it was meant to get the world's attention, so people would know that the deaths were no coincidence. And it worked, the many deaths of criminals by heart attacks was the thing that first alerted Interpol to the fact that there was either a person or a group behind it all.

Kira wanted attention. *And* Kira thought he had the right to judge who was deserving of life and when and how they were to die. These were indicative of Kira's arrogance. The realization that Kira killing criminals made him a criminal himself seemed to escape the killer. Together, everything pointed towards Kira having a god complex or a feeling of exceptionalism, thinking that he deserved to cast judgment on others without being held to the same moral standard that he holds others too. Perhaps a narcissist.

Except…when he confronted Kira over the tv, Kira did the unexpected. Yes, Lind L. Tailor was killed by Kira and it was while they were broadcasting in the area that L suspected Kira to be in, but that was the end of Kira's actions that were aligned with what L expected. The real deviations started when instead of just killing Tailor, he had something for the man to say.

L didn't want to admit it at first, but now he was ready to say that Kira wasn't altogether behaving arrogantly. Or perhaps just not *as* arrogantly as L had anticipated. Kira had been aggressive and direct during the confrontation, but instead of trying to punish L for trying to catch him and proclaiming himself to be a judge or some archangel of justice, Kira instead took the opportunity only to reprimand L like an unruly toddler for using Tailor in such a way.

While he'd initially thought that it was all performance meant to paint Kira as the "good guy", L couldn't afford to completely ignore the idea that Kira meant what he said. At any rate, Kira's words through Taylor spoke of Kira feeling some empathy, even for criminals.

And Light. Even in their short interaction, Light was far less rigid and detached than L had expected. Light's behavior when he was in his own home aside, the brunette had always appeared to carry himself with dignity and detachment when he was outside. The report from Penbar and other sources painted Light as someone respectable, always controlled.

The person he'd just encountered made him recall Naomi's description of Light, which instead showed someone who was kind and open, even a little bit adorable (in her words). It had seemed like an obvious act when L had first asked her about their interactions, with Light playing the role of a sweet younger man to appear non-threatening, but if it was an act, then it was one that Light was prepared to put on with anyone he interacted with, even a complete unknown like L.

Because there was nothing cold or unapproachable about his interaction with Light so far, albeit there were several strange things about Light's behavior that rubbed L the wrong way. He'd first noticed the strangeness shortly after they'd started their testing when Light had turned and given L that *smile* . L didn't know what to do with it.

It would have been more common for someone to frown or glare at him in that situation, since he was disrupting testing. If Light wanted

to look the golden child, all he would've had to do was go back to his test and ignore him. Why would he smile like that like he was happy to see him? L was no one to him.

Well, L considered as he called Watari. Of course, he made sure that Light actually left and wasn't listening in before he made the call. Not that he thought Light would have a good reason to listen in on his call with his current level of knowledge, anyway. *His little declaration of some connection between us might partially explain that.*

L wasn't sure what to make of the situation in general, from Light's strange initial reaction to him to the young man waiting for him and wanting to talk. He couldn't decide if Light was telling the truth about feeling an inexplicable pull towards him. L couldn't say if it was his desire to know more about that that made him agree to Light's proposition. He'd tried to get out of it at first while staying polite, but Light had been strangely pressing about it.

It almost made him wonder if Light really suspected that he was a detective. But that couldn't be possible without making one hell of a guess. Light Yagami had barely looked at him before reacting. Maybe Light's instincts really were just that good, but L couldn't come to any conclusions yet, as much as it rankled him.

At any rate, the situation was that he'd accepted spending a short amount of time with Light "hanging out". What Light really wanted, he couldn't say. Because L hadn't outed himself yet, he couldn't determine whether Light wanted something from him or if Light was just being a normal teenager and trying to make friends. Alternatively, he could have decided L might be useful to him without knowing who he really is.

It would make sense, L allowed. *I was the only person who finished even remotely close to him, he probably feels like I'm the most likely to understand him. Even with my initial refusal, I would appear to be good friend material. Fine then, Light Yagami, if you want a friend then I'll*

pretend to be that for you. And hopefully you'll slip up and show your true colors.

L found himself obliged to assure a mildly concerned Watari that he knew what he was doing and that he had a handle on the situation. He reluctantly told his assistant that he didn't know when or where he'd need to be picked up, but quickly hung up before the man tried to talk him out of it. He had a lead to pursue!

L made his way outside, along with the other hopeful students that were now trickling out of the exam room and cluttering up the hallway. He barely paid them any mind, his thoughts occupied with one student only, and they paid him even less attention. Light had been the only student to give him any special attention.

Light was waiting for him right outside the college entrance. The brunette clearly heard him approach and turned, shooting him another bright smile as he did.

Curious, L couldn't help but again. *This situation is far from what I imagined and I'm unsure how it could have gotten this way. What pull could he possibly be feeling for him to react to me in such a way?* To Light, he said, "Sorry for the wait."

"That's alright!" Light waved away. "I was thinking we could tour the campus together. It's probably open all day today for testing, so why not take advantage of it? I'm sure we're both going to make it in, so it might be helpful." The young man was practically bouncing on his heels in excitement. L followed every movement.

"If you're sure." L said by way of agreement as he started forward. "You sound quite confident in me, given your earlier comments."

"Which ones?" Light asked, jokingly. "When I said that we'd probably make the freshman speech together or when I said that if that awful proctor hadn't interrupted you, you'd have probably finished before I did?"

"...both." Was L's reluctant response, as the two walked side by side. There they were again, those two comments that completely floored L on multiple levels.

By saying that L could have beaten him and that they would probably be tied for first place Light was being quite humble and, even more than that, non-competitive. Which was unexpected.

L had initially taken Light Yagami as the competitive type. In L's experience, people who were intelligent and who were used to being on top of the hill were usually also the type who hated to lose, even battles over immature things like sports matches or grade point averages. Then again, he might just be projecting, since he was childish and hated to lose at anything, himself.

It could have been an act as Light knew full well how to come off as amiable and respectable, but L would have to make more observations to see if Light was more competitive and resentful than he let on. In the meantime, this tidbit made him line up more with Kira's own behavior. As aggravating as it was to consider seriously, his initial assumptions about Kira's personality and perhaps even their motives needed some adjustments. To start off…Kira hadn't been overtly competitive either. Overtly. There could have still been some competition between the lines, but it was only that.

And then there was the fact that this was the second time so far that he'd mentioned the proctor bothering him. It almost seemed as if Light was more upset about the interruption than L himself was. He hadn't expected the boy to speak so disrespectfully about an authority figure (a Kira-like distaste for authority?) even if it was just them here and certainly not in L's defense.

His research from all corners had at least agreed on one thing, which was that Light was unfailingly polite. Where was that now? L didn't know why it bothered Light so much…

…But he wanted to.

"You seem quite fixated on that interruption." L observed.

Light blinked his large, golden eyes. "Well, it was frustrating. You weren't bothering anyone. If anything, he was the one causing a disturbance. And for what? Because he didn't agree with the way you were *sitting?* What a petty thing to get upset about!" Light scoffed, irritation lacing the sound. "And I didn't like the way he talked to you. Barking orders like you were his dog."

L…didn't know what to do with that response. He was becoming familiar with the feeling of being wrong-footed during this case. L wasn't used to anyone defending him, definitely not with the vehemence and emotion that Light was displaying. Light didn't even know him and yet he felt so incensed on L's behalf. *What was the meaning of it?*

Was Light just a kind soul like Misora proposed? Could he possibly be putting on an act to gain L's favor, could that be it? L had wanted to meet Light for himself to get to know his suspect's personality without anyone's else's opinion coloring the data, but now that he was making his own notes, he found himself far less satisfied than he imagined.

L wanted to push forward. To get *something* he knew how to use. "Light, would you mind if I asked you a controversial question?"

"Of course, Hideki." Light glanced over at him brightly, the false name that L supplied rolling off his lips easily.

It's not normal for acquaintances to refer to each other by their first names in Japan. L contemplated. *But not only did Light accept us doing so without the slightest hesitation, even going so far as to appear happy about it, but he hasn't slipped up once by using my last name. He wants to be close to me, but by how much? Certainly closer than he's stated. I suppose it's convenient for me if he wants us to get that close, it'll be all the easier to get him to talk and to observe him.*

"What do you think about Kira?" L dropped the question onto his companion without further preamble, ensuring the teen wouldn't have enough time to prepare himself for such a question.

What will you do now, Light? Naturally, you'll want to profess your support for the police, that's a given. The average person, regardless of Kira's rising popularity in the shadows, would be too self-conscious or maybe too aware to openly support Kira. Most would keep their true feelings secret from even their close friends and family. Kira IS a serial killer being investigated by the police, after all. This is especially the case in Japan where uniformity is accentuated.

Regardless of their leanings, the average person would support the police, outwardly of nowhere else and Light isn't just anyone. He's Japan's rising star and golden boy, trying to get into the best college in the whole of Japan, and the son of the Chief of Police. If anyone needed to outwardly appear to conform to social norms, it was the person in front of him.

L's eyes dragged slowly over Light's perfect appearance. He was everything that Japan thought admirable and successful. No, what L was looking for in his question wasn't honesty. He didn't need it, he could look between the lines of whatever answer Light gave him and pick apart what kind of person Light actually was underneath the facade of a perfect student and so that everyone seemed so taken with.

Bafflingly, Light didn't look surprised at all by the question. Nothing changed on his face, his steps didn't pause or stutter, and even after L spent a moment half waiting for it, there were no demands to know why he had brought up such a topic. L watched as Light closed his eyes in thought, mulling his answer over for a second, before sighing and opening his eyes again. They pierced into L seriously and the older man met the gaze head-on.

"I think that Kira is an interesting criminal, I can see why L is so obsessed with him." Light stated.

L stopped walking. *He…betrayed an interest in Kira.* L noted, nonplussed. *One could even interpret that to be a compliment of Kira. And he was willing to admit to it, even while calling Kira a criminal. Did he feel no particular worry about the damage to his image..?* “What do you mean by that?” He asked, his voice more neutral than he felt.

“Hm? Well, I just mean that L only takes cases he’s interested in and since he confronted Kira directly basically immediately, I just thought he was kinda obsessed with him.” Light supplied, answering the question he thought L was asking.

A switch flicked in the back of L’s mind. “How did you know that L only took cases he was personally interested in?” L knew for a fact that until his confrontation with Kira, he had *not* been a household name. Not only was his name and face always hidden until this point, but his very existence wasn’t well known to those outside of Interpol. Could it be part of what Soichiro Yagami had told his family about him?

Light got a caught expression on his features for a second, before he quickly wiped it away. “You got me!” He admitted, easily. “Truth is, I had a little bit of inside information on L before this whole thing started. My father is actually the Chief of Police here and he’s known

about L for a while." And there was L's verification.

Light made a show of looking embarrassed at admitting that, but L didn't buy it for a second. He wouldn't be surprised if Light had always intended to bring up his connection with the police to make himself seem more influential and impressive, which would further indicate that he was working L without needing to know his identity. The question for L was whether or not he would reveal to Light who he really was and at which point he would do it.

He would admit to some reluctance on his part to out himself as the Detective L. Surprisingly, it wasn't due to any fear on his part that Kira could or would kill him for it, he'd taken all reasonable precautions, after all. No…his "fear", if one could call it that, stemmed from something more *uncomfortable.* Light's little confession to his sister on camera brought forward the uncomfortable possibility of the boy actually having a crush on L, which complicated matters since he was the main suspect in the Kira Case so far. If that was really true, then he wasn't certain that outing himself as the object of the boy's affection was the best course of action. He had…no way of knowing how Light would react.

He could come up with two main ideas and yet there were a dozen other smaller, more unlikely possibilities. Most likely, upon meeting his idol, L wouldn't live up to the image that Light's schoolboy crush and admiration had conjured up and said crush would evaporate. Contrary to what he'd told the Japanese investigators, he *had* shown himself once or twice before during previous investigations, but it was so rare as to have been practically nonexistent and contrary to popular thought, L did go out to things like restaurants on occasion instead of being a perpetual hermit. L knew that he was considered incredibly strange by the vast majority of people, some even considering him creepy enough to call the cops. That got slapped down pretty quick, but the underlying problem remained, that people were uncomfortable in his presence.

If Light Yagami truly felt something for L, it was clearly only a crush on an authority figure who seemed removed and perfect, it couldn't

possibly be anything more. Light had never met him before. It was obviously a common case of a young man or woman idolizing a character who seemed larger than life, the reputation of someone who had never lost a case preceding him and the mystery of the detective who never showed his face making it even more enticing. Instead of pointing his hopeless affection at a teen idol, Light did it towards the best detective in the world, feasting himself on snippets of whatever scant information his father had to give him.

It made sense. Light was the son of the police chief and an aspiring detective himself, one day. It made perfect sense that of all the authority figures he would idolize enough to form a crush, it would happen this way. Light had seen many put-together detectives in suits who walked with their backs straight and stony expressions; it would be easy for him to fantasize in his room and build an idea of what his dream L looked like. He would expect L's appearance and habits to be as impressive as his record and even if L wasn't lacking in the social skills department, it was severely unlikely that *anyone* could live up to the perfect dream version of themselves that someone else concocted. No one was as perfect as a dream, that much he knew after living so long as a detective.

Nonetheless that would be the most convenient outcome since then both L and Light could pretend the crush never was to begin with. They would never speak of it and they could both pretend that meeting L wasn't a disappointment to Light, the same way it was to everyone else.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the only option which was the cause of L's concern. However unlikely he thought it was, if the admission of his identity only caused Light to aim his affections more firmly towards himself now that he had his crush within arm's reach…

It would be extremely detrimental to the case for that particular complication to continue, nevermind his relationship with the other investigators who were *Chiefly* unhappy with the way the case is currently going.

"But it's okay." Light started talking again. The young man turned to look at L with a secretive smirk and his eyes glittering mischievously. "Because I have a feeling that Kira is obsessed with L, too."

Chapter End Notes

Light being troll until the day he dies...again...
On the topic of L! I can't imagine, unless canon L had literally no emotions of any kind (which is clearly untrue), that he wasn't affected by people constantly being disappointed by meeting him. Knowing that they, at least initially, thought that he didn't live up to his own reputation because he was being judged by the individual's internal parameters, expected to look a certain way and act a certain way in order to be judged as a successful professional.
I'm personally imagining L as someone who was disillusioned very early on in life because of how his life went and someone who disregards most other people's value, so he doesn't process personal hurt the same way someone who grew up in a loving home and cared deeply about the quality of their relationships might, but he does still feel it to whatever extent that he can. Let me know what you think of it.

The Ceremony

Chapter Summary

> L really wishes Light would give him a break in front of his father and that Kira would just kill more people already! The investigators get some more screen time.

Chapter Notes

> I've been feeling a lot better in general and less busy, so the chapters have been longer~! It feels good! Let me know if I got Matsu's nervous manner down!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hello, Light. How did the test go?" His mother said by way of greeting when he got home.

"It went fine." Light answered carelessly, his mind elsewhere.

Unseen by one of them, Ryuk was swishing about the home, looking quickly in certain corners, checking for something.

"You must be tired." His mother observed, looking worried but proud. "You should go up and take a nap."

"Thanks, I think that's a good idea." Light said, already heading up to his room. Ryuk came back and swirled around him wordlessly, as Light made his way upstairs and quietly closed his door behind him.

Saying nothing, Light dropped his bag onto his desk chair and flopped back onto his bed, resting a forearm over his eyes and letting out a deep sigh.

"Hey, Light. The cameras are still here!" Ryuk sounded surprised. Light had asked him to keep checking the house as well as his bedroom every time they came home after a long absence. "I thought they would at least take the cameras out the day that L chose to confront you. This is much longer than last time!"

It is , Light agreed silently. He wasn't bothered by it, mind, but L was certainly being stubborn about it this time. He wondered if it was because of him. It must've been something he'd done.

At any rate, L still wanted to stalk him and Light was happy to oblige. Right now, he was truly tired though. The test was easy enough, but the encounter with L took a lot out of him. Meeting him again after so long, before so much of their relationship happened, was *a lot* . In a way, it felt like that moment when he'd woken back up in his room right after dying a second time, that jarring feeling of looking around you and seeing things just the way they were before…the feeling that absolutely nothing in your world had changed except for you.

Things had changed, of course, he'd changed them…but for a moment, looking at L and listening to him talk, he felt once more as if things had never changed at all. This was L before they'd ever met, before the investigation really got going, before the man had died trying to catch him…

Being with L was perfect, it made Light feel like his world had gotten several shades brighter. After all, it was *L* . L, who never took him at face value. L, who challenged him relentlessly. L…who always looked at him like a person, rather than an idol or some perfect being worth admiring. He felt *human* when he was with L, he always had.

“I know who you’re thinking about!” Ryuk joked, doing spins above Light. “I’ll bet you’re real happy right now, you’ve been waiting for this!” Ryuk cackled loudly, unheard by the cameras and other equipment. “I can’t imagine L’s as happy as you, though! You really had to go and say that stuff, didn’t you! HA!”

I am how I am, Light hummed in his mind. *At least I gave him a little something.*

"You should really take a nap." Ryuk stopped spinning and peered down at him. "You look beat."

Probably right about that, Light thought as he yawned. *We'll…have more fun later. Sleep first.*

~ ❶ ~

L was immensely frustrated at the moment. He detested the fact that he had to work closely with others at all for this case. He preferred to work mostly alone, with limited contact with others outside of ordering them to perform specific tasks for him.

Most people were, in fact, mostly useless to him when it came to solving cases. He found that they rarely performed their assignments half as well as he would have done and he had to give them very detailed instructions that needed to be followed to the letter in order for them to get anything of quality accomplished. The only person L was aware of that could get important tasks done well without detailed instruction was Watari and the man had been with him a long time.

These investigators though, in particular, were an incredible hindrance. Most officers had the good sense to be unobtrusive and keep their mouths shut, but he supposed it was only fair to lose that in return for having a group of more trustworthy individuals who would stick with the case loyally. Mogi and Ukita were the most reserved and respectful ones of the bunch, they weren't particularly helpful but he had no further complaints. Matsuda was completely useless. He

was mostly taking up space, the Chief was experienced in babysitting him, but the young-seeming man still found ways to bother him.

Aizawa was by far the biggest hindrance in the case, he honestly wished the man had just quit with most of their department. Aizawa clearly hated him. L was convinced that the man took exception to his very existence, everything he did served only to make the man irate. Not that L was trying to get on the man's good side, but he wasn't actively trying to agitate him, either. The man was forever glaring, arguing, and yelling. He fought with L on each of his plans on principle, arguing just to argue at this point. Anything L said to try and calm the man down had the opposite effect, which was extremely vexing.

L was grateful that Chief Yagami was still intervening whenever Aizawa got too troublesome and dragged him back into line. All of the investigators highly respected their chief and he seemed to have quite the experience in managing them all. Although it would have been troublesome, he would have understood if Soichiro had stopped aiding him with what was going on currently, but the fact that he was spoke to his professionalism and his dedication to the Kira Case.

It was easy to see how much the elder Yagami was troubled by L's dealings with the younger Yagami. L had known the man was upset when he first proposed investigating the Yagami family and then even more when he wanted to put them under video surveillance. The man kept his composure and gave his permission for it all, but it was clear he resented the suspicion his family was under. It was a dangerous thing, pushing too hard on the one investigator who was most useful to the group, L knew that and he didn't make the decision lightly. And to show for it, he had…nothing.

Kira was truly frustrating and so was Light. Kira didn't kill on any sort of a schedule and even trying to average out the kills was impossible to do accurately. Kira, it seemed, killed whenever he felt like it.

There was no discernible pattern that L could see and he had spent a sizable amount of time analyzing each killing that was reasonably attributable to Kira. The only common thread tying them all was that each person killed was a serious criminal. Everything else varied, including the locations of the criminals. Most of the Kira killings occurred in Japan, England, and America, but they occurred in smaller numbers all over the globe. There was a recent killing just reported in India the previous day, a serial rapist and child abuser, apparently.

Averaging didn't help because it was common for Kira to go through times where they ramped up their murders or for there to be long stretches where the kills slowed to practically nonexistent. Because of the complete lack of a schedule, Kira's killings were already highly variable. If there were any significant shifts while the Yagami household was under surveillance, it would be worth absolutely nothing. If L was going to prove Light had anything to do with the Kira killings, he needed to either observe suspicious behavior in Light or prove that it was *Light's* behavior that was fluctuating in response to the killings rather than try to prove the reverse.

But Light was refusing to give him anything to work with and L was starting to get peeved. For the entire time that L had been watching him, Light had never once watched any type of news program nor did he read the newspaper. While he might have been able to catch up on the news outside of the house, there was no way to prove that! Additionally, Light spent little time on his computer and the only websites he visited were completely unremarkable, he didn't even go on any social media. He didn't make many phone calls or text much on his phone, Soichiro explained this by saying that he didn't know of any close friends that Light had, implying that he may not have any.

Overall, L didn't think it was actually *possible* to be any less suspicious than Light was being. And it was *precisely* that which made him even more suspicious to L. This, all of it, was unnatural. It reeked of someone putting on an act to appear innocent. He couldn't prove that it was just that yet, but it was setting L's nerves alight. Light did appear to be an exceptionally intelligent teenager, but he was still a teenager; they hung out with friends, blew off their work, had *vices* .

But Light…the only thing that can possibly be construed as bad was that he didn't actually study very much, but he continued to be the highest scorer so it was a non-issue. Otherwise, every second of Light's behavior on camera screamed innocence, but *no one* was that perfect. His instincts screamed at him that Light was Kira, no matter what evidence to the contrary the others pointed out.

L had known since he'd come to the inescapable conclusion that Kira had to be using some unknown superhuman ability in order to commit these killings, that this would be a landmark case for him. Nothing else he had done would ever compare. However, he hadn't quite appreciated how frustrating the process of solving it would be and even if some of the hardship was down to chance, he blamed one individual in particular for just how difficult his current situation was.

He could *feel* Mr. Yagami's eyes boring a hole in the back of his skull.

It wasn't his fault that he had been watching Light sleep for the last thirty minutes.

L had gotten back from the college before Light got to his house, owing to the fact that L was taken back in a car and Light had walked home. Light appeared to go straight home and the moment he got there, the young man headed straight to his room and took a nap. Even if he left, someone would have to watch the cameras to see when Light woke up and he didn't want to miss out on any observations by walking away unless Light was down for the night. L couldn't afford to give any leeway in case Light was pretending to be asleep. That was, if he somehow knew about the surveillance, which L was still figuring out how to prove or disprove.

L was in no way enjoying staring at the man as he slept, but making that fact known was unlikely to improve the chief's mood at all.

L had never cared about observing social graces or being cautious about his treatment of others. He evaluated whether a certain act would be advantageous enough to go through with it and took action depending on that. He'd never concerned himself with locating lines that others thought shouldn't be crossed, it was part of what created his flawless record. He was willing to do anything to solve a case, whereas lesser men had scruples which held them back atrociously.

But this was different. L needed, at least for the moment, to work with these men. Unfortunately, his treatment of his subject in this case was directly tied to his relationship with the other investigators and the worse that became, the more he was held back in this most important case. To some extent, Soichiro may have always balked at L's blatant disregard for the rules but he was almost as dedicated to the case as L himself. The crux of the matter really was that the person who was quickly becoming his prime suspect was the man's son.

This would not end well if L couldn't justify both his suspicion and his methods soon. He needed a good piece of evidence now more than ever to justify all of this.

If Light hadn't announced his crush on L, then this part of the surveillance wouldn't be so much of an issue. Initially, the investigators only voiced concern for putting Soichiro's wife and daughter under constant watch, they'd never considered the violation of Light's privacy in the same way. L knew why, women were given special attention when it came to their modesty and privacy versus men. However, Light's declaration had brought all of their attention to the fact that Light's modesty was under assault with the cameras installed as well and everything that L observed, as a result, was looked at with more suspicion.

He doubted he was going to make much headway in the case until the freshman ceremony, which was the reason L chose to engage Light directly in the first place. He refused to drop the surveillance because he didn't want it to be labeled an unjustified waste of time, but he got

the distinct feeling that the case would be nearing a dead end if he didn't take the drastic step of putting himself on the line by engaging his suspect directly.

L quietly simmered as he watched the cameras and a sleeping Light Yagami, feeling frustrated with his lack of progress. He didn't actually want to wait for the ceremony to engage with Light again, but he had no clear way of catching up with Light again until then.

Maybe I should have given him one of my numbers, L pondered deeply. Even if they'd only just met, Light likely wouldn't have been able to refuse his contact information out of politeness. If he had, then he would've had a way to contact Light that wouldn't seem suspicious to the chief's son, but by the end of their conversation, L hadn't had the presence of mind to consider it. His mind was bogged down by the rest of their conversation.

Light's startling comment about Kira being obsessed with L blotted out all other considerations for a time. It rang in L's ears like a confession, but he knew full well that it might not be. It could easily be argued that Light was just speculating about Kira, as L himself did…but it didn't sound that way. As Light had looked at him, as L heard the tone of his voice, Light sounded almost like he was giving some kind of secretive confession, a playful one.

Infuriatingly, it was so effective at captivating him that L only realized several hours after he'd gotten back to his current hotel room and had gone over their conversation several times in his head that Light had never actually answered his question about what he thought about Kira. Sure, he said Kira was interesting, but that was it. He didn't even say why he thought Kira was interesting. It was *intentionally* vague and L hadn't noticed at the time!

It exacerbated his foul mood to realize how off-balance he'd been during that encounter. Normally, L would have asked more probing questions in response to Light's partial answer, but the boy's diversion

had been disconcertingly effective.

But didn't that make Light just like Kira? Every time he thinks he has the upper hand, the killer does a complete 180° turn and suddenly he's lost again. L wouldn't let this rest. He would revisit that conversation with Light, no matter what he had to do.

At the moment, though, he'd settle for Light just waking up already so Mr. Yagami would stop looking at him like he was a creep.

~ ❶ ~

Light stretched as he got up from his nap. Ignoring the knocking on his door that had initially woke him up, Light checked his clock. He'd been asleep for a little under two hours.

That should be enough, he hummed blearily. He stretched his arms above his head until he heard something crack and eased himself out of bed, winding his way to the door. Just before Light made it to the door, the knob started shaking and his sister's voice called out, "Light? What's up? Why is the door locked?"

Sayu? Light got to the door and unlocked it before swinging it open. Sure enough, his sister was on the other side, waiting for him. It wasn't terribly common, but well, it wasn't like she hadn't come to visit him in his room before. Usually, to ask him for help with her homework. She had a "genius older brother", after all.

"Hey, Light! You doing anything right now?" She asked, peering past him into his room.

“No, I just woke up from a nap.” Light replied.

“Oh, right. Mom said not to bother you because you were tired, but she also said that if I needed help with homework, I should ask you and here I am!” She smiled at him. “If now’s not a good time, we can do it later.”

Of course. “No, now’s fine.” Light stepped back into his room to give her room to come in.

“Great!” She hopped into his room and pushed his extra chair up to the next. Light slid down next to her while she rooted around in her backpack and placed all the things they needed on his desk. “I’m ready!”

And so, they started on the work. The work was incredibly easy to understand for himself, the real trouble was slowing himself down to explain it to his sister. He didn’t want to just tell her the answers or she wouldn’t learn anything, so he had to figure out how she learned it best and teach her like that.

“Oh, I see! So I can find the answer that way!” Sayu beamed as she finished another problem.

“That’s right.” Light nodded. “Just solve it that way from now on, rather than how the teacher showed you. It’s a lot less confusing. And if the teacher doesn’t like that you’re not following his process, then just solve it first your way and then write down his steps over the answer and pretend that’s how you got it. Hopefully it won’t come to that, but teachers can be weird sometimes; their ego gets too tied into their job and they don’t always like change.”

“You sound like you know a lot about it, have you ever had to use it

yourself?" His sister asked. "The professor part, too."

"Sort of. I took the route of pouring over the teaching instructions, trying and trying again until I got it right the way the teacher wanted it." *It was what was expected of me.* "I took plenty of extra classes though, which you don't, so it's easier for you to just learn the way that's easiest for you." Light sighed, thoughtfully. "As for the part about professors, I've just been through a lot of school in my life. You'll have that experience too, one day, and you'll get familiar with how certain people in specific professions think and act."

Sayu looked like she was awed by the wisdom he'd gained from experience, but then her expression turned thoughtful and troubled. "Now that you mention it…why don't I have to take extra classes? Dad's never brought it up to me."

Because you're expected to go out and have fun like a teenage girl, while I'm expected to put my head down and work hard towards my career as the eldest son. He's proud of my achievements, but you're his little girl. He values you just for existing, Light shook his head vigorously before the thoughts could take root too firmly. He didn't want to be thinking this way in the few interactions he had with his sister, but it just kept coming to mind. "It's probably because I always wanted to be a detective like Dad, since I was a kid, and that takes a lot of schooling. Besides, I'm good at school so the remedial classes aren't too much pressure."

"…" Sayu stared up at him for a bit. "And what about your love life? Are you as good at that?" She asked, at last.

Huh? "Where did that come from?" Light blinked at her in surprise. Even Ryuk stopped playing around in his room and looked up at Sayu's comment.

Sayu looked embarrassed at the question. “Well, I’ve been wondering about it since you first talked about it when I was watching my show. I’ve never really heard you talk about your personal life and you never brought any girls around the house, so when you suddenly started talking about your interests…I was really surprised. Not just that you like…um…guys…that’s okay!” She hastened to reassure. “But you’ve never mentioned liking anyone or anything before, not even a character trait…I was really happy to know that you had a crush, because it gives us something to talk about!”

“Something to talk about?” Light leaned back in surprise when his sister leaned forward into his space in her excitement.

“Cute guys!” Sayu’s eyes sparkled. “You might not like Hideki Ryuga, but now we can talk about cute guys together! I know you said you like that detective, but none of us have ever seen him so were there any cute guys in your old school?! You know, now that I think about it, both of us have our favorite idols we wish real guys were like, but neither of us will ever meet ours…we’re more alike than I thought!”

Light blinked quietly in surprise as he stared at his sister going on one of her tirades. “Uh…well, I…”

“Come on, Light! Cute guys!” She pleaded, leaning closer.

“Hum…well…” Then, Light remembered something and suddenly, he felt a lot more at ease with the situation. “Funny you should say that, Sayu. I don’t like *that* Hideki Ryuga, but…” He then drew off, teasingly.

Sayu blinked, her face falling back into confusion. “Wait, ‘that’ Ryuga?”

“Yeah, *that* Ryuga.” Light nodded, sagely. “Apparently there’s another one, I met him at the To-Oh testing today.” And then, emboldened by Sayu’s own excitement and riding high on the wave of it, he leaned forward conspiratorially. “And he’s actually pretty cute.”

“What?!” Sayu’s hands shot to her mouth as she looked back at him in surprise and glee. “You found someone cute! And they actually have that name?”

Light smiled. “That’s right, he was in the same testing room as me and introduced himself afterwards. His name is actually Hideki Ryuga, can you believe it?”

“I can’t! That’s amazing! Do they look anything alike?” Sayu pried.

“Not at all.” Light laughed. “I don’t think it’s actually possible for them to look any less alike. And I can’t speak to this part of the actor, but my Hideki is really smart. He finished early, just like I did, while everyone else in the testing room was struggling.”

Sayu stared at him, almost like she was seeing him afresh, then she got a teasing look in her eyes. “ *Your* Hideki, huh? You must really like him!”

Light felt the dopey smile spread across his face without being able to stop it. “He’s great. I’ve only just met him today, but I already think he’s different from everyone else. He’s awkward and I don’t think he socializes much, but he has a sharp mind and he pays a lot of attention to me.” Light smiled down at his lap. “From the moment he came out of that testing room, it felt like I was always the center of his attention, even when he acted casually. And when we talk, he challenges me.”

L could've called the Yagami house to thank Sayu Yagami the moment that she showed up at her brother's room and woke him up. Finally, Light was awake and that meant maybe the chief would calm down with his staring and glaring. L was quite used to hostility, but it was really starting to get on his nerves when he was trying to gather information. L pushed his bowl of marshmallows closer to the other detective in the hopes of momentarily distracting the man from his suspicions of L.

What he failed to remember in that moment, was that Light Yagami was in the habit of causing him more trouble while awake than he ever had while sleeping. After a short reprieve of Light being a good older brother and tutoring his sister with her work, they started talking about Light's interests. L sat forward at this turn in the conversation. There might be something new here that he can use to further his profiling. So far, he'd only been able to make a detailed catalog of Light's favorite love dramas.

Unfortunately, Light's sister seemed to be most interested in that direction, bringing up her favorite actor from whom L had taken his alias for the day. Just as L started to think that Light would confess to liking dramas and the two would bond over that, the conversation took a surprising turn.

"I don't like *that* Hideki Ryuga, but…"

L realized immediately where this was going when Light said that or, at least, he thought he did. He couldn't quite figure out why Light would bring him up to his sister, but it was clear that he was. As the conversation between the two progressed, L grew more and more uncomfortable. His instincts were telling him that something was off about the way that Light was talking about him, that it wasn't how one would expect someone to talk about someone they wanted to befriend…

He wasn't the type to ignore his instincts, but knowing what they were trying to tell him was something else. He didn't have to puzzle over it for long, however. Sayu Yagami's next words finally brought it home for him.

" *Your* Hideki, huh?" Sayu Yagami teased. "You must really like him!"

You have GOT to be kidding me, L realized. Time seemed to slow for him as he realized the impossible situation he was starting to perceive he was in. It was inconceivable that his suspect was enamored with him as the detective L, but now there was also the nearly unbelievable addition that the boy was now gaining a crush on L as his classmate, Hideki. *I am beginning to wonder…if my luck is really this bad.*

Because what else could this be? Unless Light had the preternatural ability to identify L in all forms (a line of thought that could currently be neither proved nor disproved), L was having the worst luck of his life. His identity as Ryuga was supposed to be for fading into the background and observing until he thought the time was right to be direct with his suspect, but Light had immediately reached backstage and tugged him into the center.

And L still had trouble understanding why Light would have a crush on him in any form.

Well, Light apparently had some answer for the latter. "He's great. I've only just met him today, but I already think he's great. He's awkward and I don't think he socializes much, but he has a sharp mind and he pays a lot of attention to me. When he came out of that testing room, it felt like I was always the center of his attention, even when he acted casual and when we talk, he challenges me."

He could acknowledge that it made some sense when put that way. Of course he had been watching and listening to everything Light did and said intently, Light was the whole reason he was even in that school, but there was no way for Light to know that. For him, L was likely just a student, close to himself in intelligence, that paid attention. He'd had no idea that Light had taken his attention in such a way, but if the boy felt he was lacking in attention from others, perhaps that was enough to initially garner his interest. Of course he was also challenging Light, but it wasn't anything so friendly as it might have appeared. He was trying to see if Light would slip up and out himself as Kira!! Which he may have done? That little comment Light had made about Kira felt like a code passed between them, an admission.

L still wasn't sure what he thought about this said affection of Light's, whether it was true or if there was some other explanation that he hadn't figured out yet, but he had no choice at this point but to accept that it may be.

Light didn't see his sister's expression while he was talking, but L easily noted the soft expression on her face. He didn't like it being shown during this conversation, but he made a mental note of it all the same.

"Ryuzaki…" Soichiro started, his tone drawing L's attention - although not his gaze - from the screen. He sounded like he was struggling to control himself.

"Yes?" He inquired, still staring straight at Light and his sister continued talking.

"What happened between you and my son when you went to his college exams? And why is he calling you 'Hideki' instead of 'Ryuga'?" The man asked with affected calm. L chanced a side glance at the man before his gaze flicked right back to the screen and the Yagami siblings. Chief Yagami was staring down at his lap with determination in a way that hid his eyes from view, his hands clenched.

L let out a thoughtful hum at the question, considering his answer. “To answer the second question, Light thought it would be awkward for him to call me by the same name as a famous movie star, so he got permission to call me by my first name as a distinction. As for the first, I assure you that nothing of note took place. I assure you, Light and I just talked.”

“You say you just talked to him, but with what Light is saying–” The man couldn’t continue and cut himself off, looking very stressed. His voice lower than before, he spoke again. “My son seems very interested in you, I wonder what you said to him to achieve that?” The question was clear: why was his son interested in L of all people?

“That, I have no explanation before.” L replied honestly for once. “I don’t think anything I said was particularly persuasive. I also don’t believe I led him to believe I had any…personal interest in him. I inquired about a few points of interest and examined him directly, that’s all.”

The Chief was silent for a heavy moment. “And did you get whatever it was that you showed up for? Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve?”

Not in the slightest, L thought but would never admit to.

“Ryuzaki!” Aizawa stepped up to their chairs, loud as always. The other investigators didn’t appreciate being locked out of the investigation room all the time, though they respected that their Chief only wanted him and L to be watching for his family’s privacy, so they obtained permission to be allowed inside to help with the work every so often when both L and the Chief said they could. “Surely by now you can take the surveillance down! You’ve met Light in person, I’m sure you know now that he’s a good boy and wouldn’t have anything to do with Kira! Can’t you put an end to this yet?”

“Aizawa, hey…” Matusda raised his hand to hesitantly try to slow his coworker down, but he was interrupted by their chief.

“Aizawa, calm yourself. As much as I hate it, I understand that my son is L’s prime suspect at the moment. We’d better help him investigate Light so we can get past this more quickly.” The man in question spoke, stoically.

Aizawa calmed down instantly at his chief’s reprimand, looking briefly uncomfortable and chagrined. After a few seconds, he was able to aim a more mild glare at L. “Still, we would have more suspects if the case wasn’t solely focused on your family.”

“Aizawa does have a point.” Matsuda called out hesitantly, shooting a nervous glance around the room as he spoke. “Maybe we should investigate other people alongside Light, even if he remains our main suspect…”

“I understand that this must be frustrating for you all,” L chose to answer, not looking away from the screen. “It may seem like I’m lingering too long on Light Yagami, but I need to be thorough about this. I agree that it is taking some time to show results, I will agree to retract the surveillance cameras from the Yagami Household soon if nothing substantial comes from it. Now that I am engaging Light directly, I’ll be able to observe him more often without the cameras. In fact…I intend to invite Light to join our team.”

“Wait, hold on!” Matsuda jumped up from his spot, nearly running into Watari as the man wheeled a cart of ice cream into the room. The elderly man calmly scooped some matcha ice cream into a cone and handed it to a surprised Matsuda. “Oh…uh, thank you.” The man stuttered as Watari moved on. After a second, Matsuda startled and turned his attention back to L. “Hold on, I’m confused. Does that mean you don’t really suspect Light? If you did, you wouldn’t want him to

join the investigation…”

L groaned internally. *Matsuda shouldn’t try thinking, he just ends up lost.* “The investigation is mostly a formality at this point. Light is almost certainly not Kira, but we must be careful about this, especially if I bring Light into the investigation.” L lied smoothly, deciding that undermining his own level of suspicion towards Light was very much necessary to keep the peace. If one could call this peace, anyway.

“I guess…” Matsuda said, unsurely.

This was troublesome. It was unfortunate that Light was the chief’s son, the investigators were allowing their connection to his father to color both their views of Light and their behavior in the investigation, which was irksome. Without that connection they may not have been convinced that Light was connected to Kira, but he doubted they would be pushing so hard to move onto a different suspect.

They are right about one thing, L begrudgingly allowed. *My surveillance of Light has turned up less than nothing, it has done more damage to the investigation than help and a great deal of time has already passed. Still… the idea of conceding to Light by taking down the cameras before I get something substantial grates on me.* He grumbled. *A decision will need to be made in one direction or another, but what should I do? Am I really willing to risk the likely chance of further harm to the investigation on the off chance that we might witness some heretofore unseen evidence that implies Light is Kira?*

L’s attention was jerked back to the camera footage, by Sayu getting up while gathering her things and declaring she was going. Light’s reply was nearly enough to make L pop forward in his seat in shock. "Alright, see you at dinner! I'm going to go take a shower!"

You’ve got to be kidding me…

~ ❶ ~

Light was so ready for this. If he hadn’t frightened L off with the goings on during testing day, then he would finally see L again at the ceremony. And he was sure that he could never scare L off, no matter what he did. L was quite simply the only person that Light didn’t think he could drive away and the thought made something warm pool in his stomach.

He was in the habit of getting ready and leaving early for just about everything, which came in handy that day because his mom insisted on taking pictures of him in his suit before he left for the ceremony. Obviously, he wasn't surprised when he got his acceptance letter and he was just as unsurprised to get an additional letter informing him that he was the freshman representative and would need to make the speech.

He was also informed that he tied for first place with someone else and that he would be making the speech with them. The other student wasn't named, but they didn't need to be. He was excited to see L again and be close to him. Hopefully they could talk more than they did last time.

"Looking great, Light-o!" Ryuk flapped behind him as Light walked down his street.

To-Oh wasn't as close as his high school was, so Light needed to walk to the train and take that to the college. Since the cameras were still up in the house, they had to wait until he was outside and away from most people to have a proper conversation. Not that it stopped Ryuk from constantly holding one-sided conversations with him.

"Thanks, I wanted to look my best for today." Light grinned.

"Right! You've gotta make a speech today! Or…" Ryuk teased, playfully. "Are you trying to look your best for something else? Like your future husband maybe?"

"You know it," Light inclined his head. "I know L probably won't care beyond his profiling, but I want to look my best when he sees me again. Today's going to be a big day." He looked up at the sky with a peaceful expression.

At the ceremony, Light couldn't find L to sit with him and so he just took a seat near the front. Though he made sure to save the seat next to him. L would probably be running a little late since he didn't really have the regard for punctuality that Light did. But he'd be here.

"And now for the freshman address. Freshman Representative, Light Yagami." The man behind the podium finally announced after droning on for a considerable time about things he didn't care about.

"Ryuk, now." Light whispered to the death god sitting right next to him, so quietly it was barely audible.

"On it!" Ryuk spread his wings and flew off across the room. This was something they'd talked about before the event. In the days leading up, Light had found himself curious about what the views were of him and L among their peers. He didn't particularly care what they thought, but he did think it might be interesting. Maybe there would be something funny. So he asked Ryuk to fly around and listen in for interesting conversations and report them back to him.

"Here." Light said simply to the room, trying not to run up to the stage. He maintained a leisurely stride, as if he had nothing but time.

"And Freshman Representative, Hideki Ryuga." The man finished.

"Here!" L's voice called out in his distinctive monotone, followed by a shuffling sound. Light nearly tripped on the short stairs up to the stage, chancing a look out of the corner of his eye for L.

"Got a good one here! Two guys chatting it up!" Ryuk yelled across the room, taking advantage of the fact that no one except Light could hear him.

Light waited by the podium, trying to play it cool, while he waited for L to sidle up.

"'The student who scores the highest is supposed to give the speech right? I guess they both had to have the highest score'." Ryuk said, echoing one of the guy's words and then moving onto the other. "'I heard they both had perfect scores in all subjects.' Hey, he's sure got your number, huh! Wonder where he got that information from?" Ryuk crowed at him.

Light allowed the corners of his lips to tug up a little bit at that as he pulled out his written speech and got ready to read from it. *Probably a rumor going around started by the child of one of the high-ranking staff members here. It's correct, so it had to come from someone who knew the final grades.*

L came up to stand next to him, but he didn't spare Light a glance - none that he could see, anyway - and just looked down at the ground. As usual, he was hard to read, but he didn't seem uneasy standing in front of everyone so Light tried to focus on his speech. Still, he

couldn't help but feel a swell of admiration at how L could stand in front of an auditorium full of people on a formal occasion in a prestigious school and appear completely at ease, even with crazy hair and dressed only in a stark white shirt and old jeans.

L really is amazing, Light thought with a soft smile as he stared down at his paper without really seeing it. *My previous life, all I did was care about how others saw me and here he always was, comfortable being himself no matter what. There aren't many humans like him.*

"'It's hard to believe there are actually people like that.'" Ryuk continued to report on the conversation he was overhearing. Light flawlessly started reading out his speech while listening to Ryuk's commentary. "Oh ho!" Ryuk's head swiveled around in a way that would give a human whiplash, glancing a few rows behind him. "Sounds like one of the girls back there likes your man!"

What did they say? Light looked up for a second, glared intensely at Ryuk, and then in the next, his eyes were back on the paper. He never once stuttered in his words.

Ryuk cackled. "Okay, okay! I know what you want. One of the girls said something like, 'I think I like the one on the right' – that's L – and her friend looked at her like she was crazy and told her she was weird, pointing out how he's dressed." Ryuk snickered again at that part and returned to reporting on the two guy's conversation.

It's fine, Light sighed mentally in his head. *She can have a crush if that's what she wants. I can't fault her taste, but L wouldn't be interested anyway, so I can tolerate it.* Light finished up his part of the speech and listened to both Ryuk and the applause that greeted him at the end of his speech.

"'Those two are exact opposites.'" Ryuk switched guys again. "'Yeah,

the tall one looks like a sheltered genius who's been groomed for success his whole life.'"

WHO'S the sheltered genius?! Light spluttered in his mind, struggling not to glance incredulously at the man next to him. *Comments about my childhood aside, I really don't think I'M the one of the two of us who was groomed for success and sheltered.* Light's lips twitched sporadically as he finally glanced at L and saw him holding his own paper (which was the size of a *map*) by two fingers on each of the top corners…it was just adorable.

"'But the other one…there's something not right about him.'" Ryuk continued reporting as L started on his part of the speech. "'He's just freaking *weird* . This guy must be what they call a mad genius. Coming to the To-Oh entrance ceremony dressed like *that?* Unbelievable! Either he's crazy or he's just toying with us!'" Ryuk shot a concerned look up at Light who was standing stonily next to L on-stage. "Remember, Light-o, this is their words, not mine!" The Shinigami defended.

How dare they… Light simmered quietly, somehow managing to keep a lid on his anger. *Calling L weird and crazy, he was so close to just calling him a freak!* Light knew that was how people would react to L, how they always reacted, but he didn't like hearing it at all. Even when they were giving L compliments on his obvious intelligence, they couldn't help but be backhanded about it.

*And **again** about the clothing…* Light glanced again at L as the other man finished up his speech. This was the second time during the ceremony that someone had mentioned L's clothing choice, which he understood, but… *I think he looks nice.*

Everyone clapped politely once more and they could finally leave. Light bowed respectfully out of habit but L didn't even bother, just scratched his hair and then turned to leave after Light did. He managed to make it a few steps down before L was on him, not as

literally as he may have wanted but pretty close. He could almost feel L's breath on his ear as the man caught up to him from behind and started muttering an *achingly* familiar set of words. A little off, but not by much.

"Light? You didn't tell me your father is Chief Soichiro Yagami of the NPA…" L muttered, lowly. Light didn't think that was the same as before, but it made sense since they've already introduced themselves to each other. Still, it was giving him that weird displaced feeling again.

"Why would I bring it up?" Light shot back casually, his voice just as quiet. Then because he felt like playing ball he added, "How did you know that, anyway?"

"That's not all. I've heard that your respect for your father is matched only by your strong sense of justice and that you're planning to join the police force when you graduate." L stated this all with the heaviness of someone providing damning evidence, and that tone made it hard for Light to not burst out laughing, considering what he was saying.

Neither L nor anyone else would have any reason to disbelieve those things, but it truly accentuated the fact that he had yet to grasp Light's true goals or feelings on his life and career. On *justice* .

Being unable to read his mind, L continued on, unbothered. "And you've already got experience, seeing as you've helped the police solve a number of cases in the past. Now you're showing an interest in the Kira Case."

This wasn't something Light had thought in his past life, but now he had to wonder how L had come by that last piece of information. Most of the info he thrust at Light during this confrontation were closer to

objective facts, like who Light's father was and his career goals. Light's admiration for his father and sense of justice were more about his personal feelings, but they can be reasonably guessed from his previously stated career goals. His interest in the Kira Case though was a bit weird, because it not only had to do with his feelings and interests but also implied he was doing or saying something to interact with the case more than the average. He *was* , as Kira, but as Light Yagami, his interactions with the Kira Case were all supposedly incidental. They weren't, obviously, but L had no proof otherwise.

I wonder, are you trying to push your feelings about that onto me, L? You don't think my run-ins with Naomi and the investigators were accidents so you're trying to indirectly but verbally express that? Maybe to see how I'll react to the hidden accusation? Light peered at him from the corner of his eye as Light sat down in his seat. As expected, L followed him and sat in the empty seat he'd saved. Success! Light fist pumped in his mind.

"Okayyyy…" Light made a show of confusion. "Are you trying to get me interested? I already am, so where are you going with this?"

L glanced at him the same way, but his wide-eyed gaze was as intense as ever. "I'm impressed by your abilities and your sense of justice." *You really don't know anything about what my sense of justice looks like,* Light hummed, relaxed. "If you promise not to tell anyone, I have important information concerning the Kira Investigation that I'd like to share with you.

"I won't tell. Promise!" Light smiled at him, turning to face L fully. He was so ready for this.

L's voice dropped to a whisper and he turned to face Light head-on as well, focusing all of his attention squarely, unashamedly on the brunette. "I wanted to tell you that I'm L." This was said as the man stared at him with so much intensity, as if he were trying to see details on the tip of a needle.

There was so many things that Light could have said at that, so many responses he could give. He could say he knew or pretend to be surprised, but instead what slipped out was:

“I’m a Kira supporter.”

Chapter End Notes

L being forced to watch Light sleep while Soichiro is forced to watch it…in my mind, I’m seeing the scene where Misa accuses L of being a pervert because he’d be accompanying her and Light on their dates and L saying that he isn't doing it because he's enjoying it or anything.

On the note of Light, for him to get genuinely closer to his sister and form a meaningful relationship instead of his previously shallow one, he needs to confront his resentful feelings about how he was always held to a higher standard than her. And he probably isn’t the only one who needs to confront this. Even if he doesn’t blame his sister for the double standard, she’s deeply connected to it, being the opposite to the pressure and expectations that were always heaped upon him. He needs to be able to be open and honest with her and their family about how they’ve made him feel and they need to be able to hear it.

First Date

Chapter Summary

L calls it an interrogation, Light calls it a date.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I was fully intending to have Sayu show up in this chap and to have Light meet Matsuda here, but the chapter was getting long. It's already nearing 8000 without the additional two scenes minimum that that would add. I thought hard about how much I was willing to shoehorn into this chapter and decided to just put it towards the next chap. Very sorry about that, but while writing it, the chapter simply got away from me. But! Sayu will be in the very first scene of the next chapter (I've already written part of it) and Matsu will be in the second or third! Sorry for denying you Matsuda, but it'll allow me to delve more into the scene than if I stuffed it in here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For a moment, L heard the echo of a clock ticking in his ears and he forgot how to function. He could only keep staring at Light, as if on auto-pilot. His hand, though, clenched his knee tightly as his mind ran away from him. In this state, he didn't truly pay attention to Light's own surprised expression.

Did he really just say that? Did Light Yagami just admit to supporting Kira, a serial killer ravaging the world? And to someone claiming to be *L?*

He couldn't believe what he had just heard. He knew, he *knew* there was more to Light than the boy wanted people to know, though he couldn't accept that it was something so mundane. Much of the populace did seem to quietly support Kira, much of which was due to Kira's painting themself as *heroic* , so it wasn't as if Light were unique in that regard. But for Light to so easily break his perfect persona and in front of someone like L who knew his father…what could lead him to make such an admission and to someone like L, of all people?

Was Light serious? Even if he wasn't, to say that…

It was pure madness. Pure madness and yet…

It's a strategic decision, even more advantageous than my own. L thought, coming back to himself little-by-little. *Yes…that makes sense. This is very clever of you, Light.*

As he thought this, L began to slowly calm down and he started to get into the right headspace. Analyzing situations and breaking them down always allowed him to feel more in control and detached from what was happening. If he could analyze something, he could come to understand it in time. If he could discover a solution, he could overcome it.

L had admitted to his own identity so that he could accomplish a few things. First and foremost, he wanted to push Light into a corner. No matter what Kira had tried to convince people during that first live broadcast, L knew that Kira *had* to want him dead. No matter what feelings Light may or may not have for him, he couldn't suffer L to live because as long as L was alive, Light risked capture. And if, against all evidence to the contrary, Light proved not to be Kira and just be a supporter then he should still want L dead to protect his messiah. Quite a few people had already wished for L's death on media platforms in defense of Kira.

However, Light couldn't successfully kill L if he didn't know his real name so the fact that he knew who L was and his face was supposed to agitate the killer greatly. Being so close to the demise of his enemy and yet so far from it would anger him and that would make him more likely to make mistakes.

As for the other reason…L had come to the conclusion that Light had some small crush on him despite L's obviously inadequate appearance and manner. Baffling as it might be, Light just didn't seem to care. He'd shown no hesitation in his interest which he had in spite of thinking L was just a regular student. If being anonymous offered no more advantage than being known for who he was, then L would have to choose the advantage of being able to talk to Light directly as L. Especially if it put the boy on edge. It was a calculated decision that was favored by the circumstances.

But Light's declaration…

You're trying to cover for yourself, aren't you, Light? L peered at him with renewed vigor, having reestablished his equilibrium in this conversation. *With Light claiming to be a supporter of Kira, he could argue that numerous oddities in your behavior are down to that. Within reason, if Light appears to show strange behavior regarding Kira in the future, he could argue that that explains it. This especially goes for the circumstantial evidence. Claiming to support Kira may harm his interpersonal relationships, but it's certainly not illegal so it's preferable to being labeled as Kira himself. I believe I have underestimated my opponent…Even so, what a bold declaration.*

"I see…" L truly couldn't think of another response to what Light had just said. His mind was whirling with how he could work around this newest obstacle.

"Um…sorry." Light made a show of fidgeting. "I didn't mean to say that, it just slipped out." He looked for all the world as if he were being genuine, but L wasn't about to buy that.

Sure you didn't. "It's quite alright. I understand that it's not an admission one would want to make to someone they don't know well, but I won't judge you for it." L stated, trying to appear non-judgemental. "But I must admit, I find it very surprising, given who you are."

"I assume you mean my father?" Light responded, shooting a look at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Well yes," L admitted easily. "While the children of police officers and government officials are sometimes rebellious in their interests, I didn't take you for the type." He was interested in seeing how Light would respond to that and his eyes bore into his opponent.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have the dead eyes of a shark?" Light asked, smiling brightly at him.

"...excuse me?" L squinted a little at the other man, deeply confused by the newest turn in the conversation.

"Well, it's just that you're always intensely staring at me without blinking and it reminded me of a shark. There are some other similarities, too." Light rubbed the back of his head with a sheepish smile.

No, no one had ever told L that. It sounded plausible, however. He'd gotten more glares than he could count and overheard enough slights and insults to have an idea of how he generally appeared to people. However, few people had told him these things directly and precisely none of them had done so without making it into an insult. Certainly not with Light's friendly expression, free of disdain.

L rarely felt insulted even when he knew it was the intention, but he felt certain – inexplicably so – that insulting him wasn't Light's intention and he didn't know what to do with that.

"No, I can't say that I've ever been told that." L replied through his

confusion. "Thank you for the information."

"You're welcome!" Light said bouncily, but added nothing else.

"I hope it doesn't bother you." L pressed, trying to make sure his eyes bore into Light harder. He wanted to get some kind of reaction out of Light besides happiness, it was becoming something of a strong desire.

"Not at all," He was becoming sure that Light was taunting him with happiness now as he continued to smile at him. "It's unique."

L pressed his thumb to his lip and leaned forward slightly. "Unique?" He repeated, intrigued.

Light's eyes drifted to L's thumb before going back up to L's eyes. "Yeah. Most people's eyes are really expressive, but I've never been able to read yours. It's like they have no emotions at all, but at the same time, they're so deep…"

"Deep?" L inquired further, feeling more like he didn't understand this conversation the longer it went on.

"Definitely," Light said, starting to stare right into his eyes. "They look *black* . Like deep voids, I could just get sucked into them."

For the first time in possibly his entire life, L actually felt the urge to look away. It was an absurd urge that he ignored, but it was there. It was inexplicably hard to face Light when he was like this. He wasn't used to people who were hard to understand. "Well, I'm glad you're not uncomfortable." He didn't mean that in the slightest. L's voice was even more lacking in feeling than normal as he endeavored to reply in

this impossible situation.

Light flashed him a quick smile. "About what you said earlier…"

"About your father?" L responded.

"Yeah, but what you said even before that, about my sense of justice." Light suddenly started clapping and L realized the ceremony had completed. The people around them started standing up and getting ready to leave, but Light remained seated, so he did as well.

"Maybe the reason you didn't take me as the type to be rebellious is because I'm not. Not intentionally, anyway." Light had a small, wistful smile on his face. He gazed straight ahead of himself while not appearing to look at anything, but L's gaze remained on Light's face as the boy explained. "I doubt my dad would be happy to hear my thoughts on Kira, but I'm not being contrary just for the sake of it. It's just that I'm my own person, not an extension of him. He did succeed in instilling me with a sense of justice, like he'd wanted, but I'm afraid it's not identical to his own. Far from it, in fact."

"I see. Yes, I think I'm beginning to see that." L murmured, taking in the slightly melancholic air surrounding the young college student and for the first time, he thought he really did see. In this moment and at least on this topic, L thought he understood.

~ ❹ ~

"Thanks for inviting me out, Light. You said you knew a good bakery nearby?" L's tone was lighter than normal as he followed Light down the street, away from To-Oh.

"No problem!" Light smiled. When he'd come back in time, he'd gone in search of good bakeries for when L showed up, the closer to their college, the better. And if he got to slightly impress L by being able to show him establishments that you couldn't find online easily…that was no one's business but his. "I guess by your admission earlier, you're new around here. Have you been to Japan before?"

"You're right, I haven't been in Japan long. I have been here before, but that was a long time ago. A lot has changed in those years." L answered.

"I suppose you came all the way here for the Kira Case." Light pondered aloud. "The investigation and everything. You did say that Kira was in this region of Japan on that live broadcast." Knowing L would prefer it that way, Light chose not to refer to L as himself while in public and keep his references to the man suitably vague.

"I suspect you'll need some sort of proof that I am who I say I am." L said instead.

Light followed behind him. "Actually, it's not necessary. I'm willing to believe you, no evidence required."

L stopped walking at that and Light stopped too, which left him staring at L's back. L stayed still for a minute before looking back at Light over his shoulder. "I find myself a bit confused about the faith you've been showing in me. You could at least entertain the idea that I'm lying to you." He grumbled, sounding almost unhappy about his acceptance.

Light smiled and started walking again, this time with L following him. "Oh, I'm sure you're lying to me, I'm just reasonably sure that you're also L." He casually admitted.

"And what is it that makes you so sure?" L's response took a moment.

"There are a few things in particular, but I suppose the main reason I can accept it so easily is because it makes sense." Light mulled it over. "A guy who doesn't seem like he's from around here suddenly shows up. He's clearly intelligent and acts aloof and no one really seems to know him. Finding out you were L…fit. It fit really well."

"Well, I suppose when you put it like that, it does seem like less of a revelation." L sounded a bit put out by that, at least to Light's ears. "How much further is it?"

In a normal conversation, that question would just have been a curious question, but Light knew L too well. L suspected him of being Kira, had for a while, and was probably wary of wherever Light *claimed* to be taking him. The two of them, alone…

The thought sent a shiver of excitement down Light's spine, though he suspected L wouldn't share his reaction to the thought. Light really was just taking L to a lovely bakery he'd found, he had no interest in betraying his detective now or in the future. However, L wouldn't be completely convinced until they got there. The Kira that L was suspecting wouldn't want to miss the chance to try and kill L while they were alone, after all, so it only made sense to be wary with what little L knew.

Luckily for L, the situation wasn't what he thought it was. With Light's superior knowledge and abilities this time, as well as a well-checked ego, if he wanted L dead then he could've had it *ages* ago. With the names and locations he knew, either he or Ryuk could've bodied L, Watari, all of the investigators, and L's little group of prepubescent successors. In his first life, Light would have arranged it all already with extreme satisfaction and that thought made him wince in discomfort.

"Not much longer, don't worry." Light cheerily replied. "It's just on the next street!" L spent the next handful of seconds in silence and Light swore L was thinking so hard that equations were floating around in the air. But L didn't make him wait for long to find out what he was thinking of.

L stopped walking. “Before we go any further, I feel I should tell you that I suspect you, Light Yagami, of not being a mere Kira supporter but of being Kira yourself.” His dark eyes bore into Light, unblinking, and Light stopped walking too.

The comment wasn’t nearly so shocking for him as the first time L had said it, even if it was said earlier than he was supposed to say it. If he remembered correctly, L should’ve said this after they played tennis days later, not on the day of their entrance ceremony. Then again, things were going differently now, including them spending time together after the ceremony which they hadn’t done before. Maybe his behavior was putting pressure on L to act more quickly and bump up the timeline?

Whatever the reason, Light took a moment to think about how he was going to respond to this one, L watching him all the while. Unlike earlier where his mouth got the best of him and he’d blurted out that line about supporting Kira (not that he minded that when he had time to think about it), he wanted to think this through. L was probably getting frustrated with Light’s lack of reactions to anything he did and this was likely him trying more and more to get a reaction out of him by any means necessary.

“If you think I’m Kira, then why did you introduce yourself to me?” He asked, tone low.

“If you knew I was L, why did you admit to supporting a serial killer?” L returned, but didn’t wait for Light to respond before he continued. “I

wanted to see you for myself."

"And do you like what you see?" Light gave a nervous smile, talking about everything but Kira in that moment. He ignored the other part of his statement.

L hummed. "That remains to be seen. We'll need to spend more time together before I come to any conclusion." Light had the strong feeling that L had completely missed the point just now. "But is that really all you have to say about me suspecting you of being a killer?"

Light started to walk again and L slowly started to follow him. "I'm still processing it to be honest, but I suppose I should feel honored that you think I could be Kira. I suppose that must mean you think very highly of me."

"...Perhaps." L offered, hesitantly.

Just as he'd said earlier, when they turned the corner onto the next street, Light saw it. "There!" He declared, triumphantly. So excited about being able to finally bring L to the place, Light unthinkingly reached out to L and grabbed him by the hand, immediately pulling him towards the storefront. L made a hard-to-describe surprised sound, but Light paid basically no attention as he beelined for the cafe like a torpedo.

"Uh, Light–" L started.

"We'll be there in a sec." Light said. They crossed the street, Light dragging L and L coming along easily enough. They got to the front door and Light stopped to open it before pulling L inside. The interior was just as he remembered it, classy but simple and dark in design. The floors were gray tile and the walls were covered in some kind of

wood paneling. Most of the furniture and seating was made out of a dark wood that the waitress told him was Walnut when he'd asked.

He was happy to see that his usual booth by the window was empty and he tugged L over to it. "Do you mind sitting here?" He called over his shoulder without looking back.

"...I think this seating will be fine, but…Light, are you holding my hand right now?" L's voice sounded even more neutral than normal and Light glanced curiously over his shoulder.

… *oh.* So he was.

Light hadn't fully realized he'd been holding onto his hand this whole time until he'd actually stopped to think about it, not that he was particularly upset by that revelation. He honestly didn't want to let go now that he knew. Even though L's hand was a little cold, the parts where their skin was touching felt warm and Light found that he liked the feeling of L's hand in his. *But,* he reasoned, *this might make L too uncomfortable too quickly.* So letting himself enjoy it for a second longer, Light twisted his expression into something sheepish and dropped L's hand. "Sorry about that, I was just excited!"

"It's quite alright." L responded, nonetheless looking at him oddly.

"So…let's sit!" Light exclaimed cheerily and slipped into his own seat at the table. He had to hand it to L, the man didn't waste time following him in sitting down. L sat on the opposite seat lowering himself into his usual crouched position.

"So, Hideki. Are you excited to be starting college here? Have you been to college anywhere else?" Light asked, enjoying the pseudo-date they were on. He knew so little about L's experiences in general, he

wanted to know more. Though he knew L would be vague and cagey about it, because of course he would.

“No, I’ve never attended college.” L admitted easily, probably because Light couldn’t research his identity from records that didn’t exist. “May I ask why you’re still calling me that?”

“What? Hideki? Well, I don’t have anything else to call you and besides, I like that name. And,” Light gave a small, soft smile. “It’s the name you gave me when we first met, so I prefer it.”

“…I see.” L paused, taking Light in like one would a troublesome puzzle. ”Thank you for bringing me here, Light. I must admit, it’s a lovely cafe.” L endeavored to say, but his gaze remained firmly fixed on Light.

Light grinned, regardless. “You’re welcome! I knew you’d like this place and just wait until you try the desserts!”

L once again pressed a thumb to his lip and stared intensely. “I can’t help but wonder what it was about this place that you thought I would like or why you keep talking about this cafe’s sweets.”

Well now, that was hard to answer. In truth, Light knew that L spent a lot of time in dark rooms, especially with all the lights off. It was almost a habit of his. L hadn’t ever really indicated in any other way that he had any kind of light sensitivity, but he still thought that – given that clear preference for darker spaces – L would appreciate the darkly colored cafe more than the more common bright and peppy ones. Plus, he made sure the place would be relaxed enough that L wouldn’t have to deal with any comments about the way he sat, like with that awful proctor who should’ve had better things to do…

And of course, L's love of sweets was infamous and it was the first thing he'd looked for when he thought of where to bring L. Light had spent 24 hours a day with L for over two months and he had *never* seen him eat anything below a certain sugar content. He had to make sure the sweets were good enough for his connoisseur.

Saying any of that to L was off the table. So… "You seem like a pretty simple guy." Light said, coming up with stuff on the spot. "I don't mean that in a bad way, it's just that you're not really flashy and you're quiet so I thought someplace dark and relaxed would suit you better! And I think everybody likes sweets." If L doesn't believe him when he's telling the truth, there's no way that he was gonna buy the load Light was giving him. He wouldn't come out and say so, though. He'd just continue to suspect him of lying, quietly.

"I give off that impression?" L asked.

Light's eyes drifted slowly over L's white shirt and jeans. "Immensely."

"Well, learn something new every day." L wrote off just as a waitress came by to take their order.

"I'll have my usual." Light smiled at her and she smiled back.

"Sure thing, Light." The waitress responded cheerily and turned to L.

"I recommend the strawberry shortcake." Light encouraged. He knew that L had a special fondness for both cake and strawberries.

"Yes, that sounds good." L muttered with some surprise and proceeded

to order that, as well as several other items off the menu, including a chocolate mousse and a parfait. The waitress's eyes popped open at the amount of sugar this man was prepared to consume, but was a consummate professional and said nothing about it before going back to get their sweets.

L hummed deeply when he popped the first bite of strawberry shortcake into his mouth. "This is truly delicious, one of the best I've had, in fact. This is a really good place, Light." L commended him again.

Light glowed with the praise. "Thanks. I really like it here, too." He said, digging into his own dessert; an apple tart.

If this was the original timeline, I'd be expecting to get hit with a bunch of photographs. Will he try the same thing again? I didn't leave any messages so he'd have to falsify the photographs and come up with his own message, but he already did that once before… Light pondered, his mind drifting a little. He honestly wasn't sure what he would prefer, but it seemed he was so lost in thought that he missed something that L had just said.

"Could you please say that again?" Light asked, shaking himself.

"As I admitted to you before, I am L." He said, almost like he was trying to remind Light of that fact. "And I am currently working to catch Kira. I have been working closely with a small group of trusted investigators. Among them, your father."

"Well, I suppose that sounds right. I did know he was working on the case." Light responded, trying to look as confused as possible. "But what does that have to do with me?"

"I didn't show up in front of you for no reason." L stated, continuing to eat. "I have a great respect for your abilities and so I would like to invite you to join us in catching Kira."

"I think there might be some misunderstanding here." Light informed him, doing his best to keep up the surprised look he was giving the other man. This was the moment he'd been planting seeds, planning for. The moment L asked him to join so he could keep an eye on him.

"Misunderstanding?" L prodded, glancing back up at him.

Light leaned forward, earnestly. "I want to make it clear to you that I have no interest at all in joining the Kira investigation."

"No interest?" L murmured, staring at him. "I had thought you would be interested, given that I've been told you want to be a detective in the future."

"You've been told? By who, my father?" Or was it the surveillance cameras and wiretaps in his bedroom?

"Your father has been most helpful in providing information to clear you." L said, agreeably.

Ha! You're doing it again, Light scoffed mentally. *That statement has two meanings, as usual. On the surface, you're trying to comfort me, but really, you're trying to make yourself appear less antagonistic by implying that you're trying to clear me rather than the reverse. You're not even slightly interested in clearing me, just making it seem like that's your motivation to make me less wary of you. So I'll slip up somewhere.*

Light played around with the baked apple he had on his plate. On *top of that, you're also planting the idea that my father has been providing you **liberally** with information, making me wonder just what exactly he's told you. You want me to second guess lying to you too, don't you? Which doesn't matter much, since you'll take anything I say as a lie, anyway.*

He skewered an apple slice and popped it into his mouth. You're *quite the man, I'll give you that.*

"Mm! You were right about the cake being good here, Light." L commented, also having another bite of one of his desserts.

And now he's trying to agitate me by switching the subject to something superfluous, but I can play that. "Right? They're so sweet but they also have so many different flavors going on." Light made a show of savoring a bite of his dessert. "About being a detective in the future…" Light hummed. "I haven't been aiming for that for a while now."

"Is that so? Why the sudden change?" L pressed a thumb to his lips, leaning forward slightly. He was looking at Light like a strange new species of animal. "I take it you haven't told your father."

"No reason, just growing up." Light shrugged. "As for Dad, he's rarely home as it is these days and when he does come home, he just has dinner and goes to sleep, then leaves early the next morning. Sometimes he doesn't even have dinner. So I don't get to talk to him much except for when I drop things off for him at the station. I don't always see him when I do that, but it's the most common time I get to see him these days." He said, playing with the food on his plate, pushing it around. He had no problems talking to L about this even if L tried to use it against him. He felt too comfortable with him to not talk.

He would take responsibility for some of that. Kira's appearance

increased his father's workload quite a bit and he felt a little guilty for it even if it wasn't his intention but more of a by-product. He'd take responsibility for his part in his father not being home, but his father was who he was and that at least Light couldn't control. His job, his position, and his drive were his own. There were other people on the force though and his father had always been a workaholic so they were used to his frequent absences.

"Besides," Light sighed. "I don't think he'll be happy to hear me say it, he's so proud of me following in his footsteps. Why make one of our few interactions together a negative one?"

"That makes sense. I imagine you'd want to enjoy the little time you have with your father and not bring up anything unpleasant." L replied, then he cocked his head at him. "Your father is indeed quite proud of you. I understand why you wouldn't want to sacrifice that."

Light allowed a weak smile. "I care about my father, but recently I've been thinking that I need to make my life my own. I can't follow in his footsteps for everything, because I'm not him. So what I'm trying to say is I appreciate your offer and your compliments on my skills, but I don't feel the strong desire to join the Kira Case. I'm sure that with you and my dad working on it, you won't be in desperate need of my help."

L took in his expression as he carefully answered. "I understand your feelings on the matter, even if I do find it surprising. I'd hate to miss out on utilizing your intellect, but if your mind is made up then I suppose I have no choice to accept. Still, would you at least consider coming to our investigation's current location just once to speak to the other investigators? If after meeting the others you still don't want to assist us, I'll fully accept your decision."

The thing was, Light wasn't sure what exactly L was going to do when he decided he was going to play hard-to-get with the invitation. He was certain, both in this and the other life, that L really, *really* wanted

him on the investigation team. It basically meant L could keep an eye on him constantly and actively searching for Kira would put far more pressure on Light.

In his previous life, Light had been pretty anxious to be on the team, too. It brought him closer to the investigation so he could see where it was going *and* it brought him closer to L, all the easier to try and find out the man's identity. It was one of those unnerving situations where he and L both wanted the same thing. He just wasn't exactly sure what to expect from L if he turned him down and didn't act desperate to prove himself.

This seemed reasonable, though. L wanted to convince Light to join the investigation despite his hesitance by making him feel pressured by his father and the other investigators, but didn't want it to be obvious that's what he was doing. If Light agreed to go there at least once, it also meant that he was at least a little open to changing his mind about it. In truth, Light wanted nothing more than to be on the team, if only so that he could get more routine access to L. They could spend time together every day again! But he wasn't just going to throw himself at the investigation this time. If L wanted him to join, he'd have to work for it a little first.

"I'm really not sure that's a good idea." Light said, wariness painted across his face. "I don't think I'm going to join and I'm sure the safety of this case relies on secrecy. Someone not involved in the case probably shouldn't be going to your base of operations and seeing the faces of all of the detectives, especially since I'm…"

"A Kira Supporter." L finished for him.

"Yeah…" Light responded. "I'll keep your secret about being L, I will, but I don't know how much of a good idea it is for me to get any more involved than I already am." He was really going to make it seem like he doesn't want to join. Besides, he had too much acting talent to waste on a half-effort.

"That's a risk I'm willing to take." L informed him, but was cut off by his phone ringing. *Of course you're willing to, you know I'M Kira and you know I can't risk killing you now that you've introduced yourself only to me,* Light thought fondly.

"Excuse me, I have to take this." He fumbled around in his pocket and just as he started to pull his phone out, Light's own phone rang.

Light froze, still like a statue, as a memory was violently jarred loose. A memory he was currently living. He'd forgotten about it, especially since there had been no photographic tests this time…Light didn't reach for his phone, too frozen with realization to grab it.

This didn't stop L if the man noticed his reaction and he answered the phone. "Yeah?" L listened for a second and then his eyes turned shocked and he jerked forward. "Light, it's your father, he's–"

"–had a heart attack."

~ ❶ ~

“Please, just go home and get some rest.” Soichiro said to his wife, who until then had been fussing over him in his hospital bed.

“Alright, I’ll see you tomorrow. Have the hospital call home if you need me to bring you anything. Light? Don't stay too long and be home soon.” She asked, turning to Light who was sitting at his father’s bedside with L.

“Of course. Don’t worry, Mom, just go home.” Light said quietly, flashing her a smile. She smiled back and quietly left.

Light sighed and turned back to his father. “So they think stress was the only cause?” Light asked, already knowing the answer.

“Yes." Soichiro groaned. “To be honest, I thought it was Kira when I first collapsed.”

“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t worried it was Kira when I first heard, but it couldn’t be. You’re a police officer and Kira doesn’t kill cops.” Light reached out to the man’s hand laying limp on the bed and squeezed reassuringly. "I feel guilty though."

"Don't be." Soichiro said, ignoring the comment about Kira. ”It seems I’ve been pushing myself a bit too hard lately, but I’ll be fine.”

“Indeed.” L said tonelessly, stating the facts as they were. “It must have added to your stress knowing that Light is the primary suspect of my investigation.”

“It's not your fault, either. Me and Mom tried to tell him that the case would be too much for him at his age and dangerous on top of that.” Light informed L, shooting his father a look.

“Now, Light,” Soichiro sighed heavily. “We’ve been over this. It’s my job and that’s that. I have to do it. I knew it would be dangerous anf I accepted that.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know…” Light huffed. “Your job, which means you have to do everything for it without fail, even if it sacrifices your

health. You accepted it, which means we have to."

This must be an argument they've had multiple times in the past, L thought while taking in Light's irritated expression.

"Light, please." Soichiro sighed, exhausted.

"Okay…" Light sighed too and glanced away. "Sorry, I didn't mean to stress you out after all this."

"Thank you for coming." Soichiro said, looking at L. "I'm sorry for the trouble."

"Not at all." L responded. "I've already made my identity clear to Light, he is aware of the situation."

"Yeah." Light turned back and smiled at them a little. "I know that he's L and that I'm a suspect."

L cocked his head as he glanced at the teen, he found his strange reactions to things very confusing. Soichiro Yagami was clearly worried and stressed about Light being under suspicion, but Light himself was completely calm about it. If anything, the boy seemed to find it some kind of amusing.

"That's true." Soichiro acknowledged with a resigned expression and directed his next question to L. "So, Ryuzaki, now that you've had the chance to talk more extensively with my son, can he finally be cleared as a suspect?"

“Ryuzaki?” Light inserted, looking between them in confusion.

“You know me as Hideki Ryuga,” L decided to answer. “But the pseudonym that the other investigators are calling me is Ryuzaki.”

Light thought about that for a second. “You really have a thing for R names, huh?” Somehow, that wasn’t a response that L had expected, but that was normal when dealing with Light. For some strange reason, the young man never gave an ordinary, expected response to anything that happened. Of all the strange observations to make…

“And as for suspicion, when I say I suspect him, you should know it’s very minor.” Which wasn’t an answer, but L didn’t feel like Soichiro would react well if he told him what he was actually thinking. At this point, L was almost absolutely certain that Light was Kira, regardless of whatever the boy might have claimed about being a *follower* of Kira. Light Yagami was just too strange and he fit too much to not be Kira, even if so much about him confused L. “We’ve gone over this, but I’ll say it again for Light’s benefit.”

L turned to look straight at Light as he talked, gazing steadily at his face. He most definitely wanted to see Light’s reaction to this information. “Not long ago, I had the Yagami Household put under surveillance and I specifically had Light watched by one of a few American FBI agents that were sent over here to assist with the case. The agent assigned to Light was Raye Penber, who you’ve both met thanks to the kidnapping issue a while back. This was because we had reason to believe that someone in the police force was connected to Kira and so both them and their families were investigated. I hope you aren’t offended that we did this without your knowledge.” L especially zeroed in on Light’s face when he said the last part. He was challenging Light to get upset or offended, needling him about it, but of course Light refused to react accordingly, as he always did.

“Of course not!” Light smiled at him. “Why should I be insulted by you daring to do your job? If anything, I commend you for being willing to investigate the families of the people you work with. A lot

of people would have let the personal connection stop them from doing what they needed to do."

There was absolutely nothing wrong with Light's reply and it made L frown harder. Light's response was above reproach and yet, wasn't that abnormal? Most people in Light's situation would probably be angry about being watched like that or at least uncomfortable, but Light took it all easily. He didn't act surprised about anything he'd heard, just accepting it at face value. He should be asking questions… it was very strange that he wasn't and L didn't know what to make of it. These small details made him certain that there was more going on here, but how to prove it..?

"Exactly so. I've never been interested in letting personal relations get in the way of a case." L's eyes bored into his. L wasn't going to let any personal relationships get in the way of solving the case and catching Kira, his gaze said. He was sure Light was intelligent enough to understand what L was saying without him having to spell it out. L frowned even harder when Light's smile widened.

"I find Light's intelligence impressive." L told Soichiro, but he still did not look away from Light. "He's quick-witted and direct, I would like him to assist in the investigation."

"Absolutely not! I forbid it!" Soichiro insisted immediately, sitting up halfway in his hospital bed. "I will not have my son get mixed up any further in this madness!"

"I understand how you feel, but…" L started, but Light cut him off.

"It's not like I'm really interested in joining this case anyway, Dad." Light's statement caused Soichiro to look at his son in surprise, giving him all of his attention. L stayed silent and watched the two interact. Maybe an opportunity to convince the chief about having Light on the

team would appear. “I know that I’m just a college student and that I have no business being involved in a dangerous case, especially such a big one. I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t leave it to the professionals. Even if you guys haven’t made much progress so far, I have no doubt that you will succeed if you keep working on it.”

“Light…” Soichiro looked touched.

“I’ve agreed to go to your current headquarters to see and talk to the other investigators, but after that, I’m sure things will go back to normal. I’ll keep going to school, same as ever. Meeting the other investigators is just a concession I made because L is determined to get me to at least consider the idea.” Light nodded to himself, crossing his arms.

“You’re taking him to meet the others?” Soichiro asked L.

“That’s right,” L responded with his mind still dissecting everything Light had just said. “I do truly feel that it would be beneficial to the investigation were Light to join us. I believe his insight and intellect could really help us make some headway in the case. That is why I convinced him to come by our current setup. I’m hoping that seeing what kind of work we do will engage him enough to join.”

“Ryuzaki, I understand that you only want what’s best for the case, but like Light, I’m not sure how comfortable I am with him taking part in this. It’s a dangerous case and he’s my son.” The man said steadily, looking right at him as he spoke.

“I understand.” L said and allowed the statement to be on its own for a moment.

And he did understand. The Kira Case was extremely dangerous and

each and every person who worked to catch Kira were in mortal danger. In the end, they all risked suffering a painful death. All of those currently involved in the investigation, from Chief Yagami to Naomi Misora, were adults who had already been in careers that came with a distinct amount of danger, but Light was different.

While now 18 years old, he would not be a legal adult until he was 20. On top of that, he was a college student rather than a seasoned officer or agent who was used to danger and no amount of slight assistance on previous cases would change that. On top of that, knowing that Light was also a suspect (even if L lied about just how suspicious he was) would make him wary about having Light be anywhere near him, as well as…

"You should go home now, Light. I'm being well looked after now and you need your sleep, it's already getting late." Soichiro insisted.

"Fine." Light acquiesced. "You rest up too, okay? Job or no job, I better not hear about you collapsing again, Dad, okay?"

"Alright, Light." Soichiro said softly, smiling for the first time since the conversation had started. Light reached out and squeezed his father's hand once more before glancing at L with a smile and leaving.

"I do apologize for the stress my suspicions have caused you." L said, once Light was out of the room. As he said this, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and sent a text to Watari to have him pick him up out front.

"It's alright, you're only doing your job. It's just that Light is my son…" Soichiro sighed, clearly tired.

"I'll let you get some rest." L said, climbing out of his chair. As he

approached the door, he called out one more thing before leaving. "Please recover fully before rejoining the investigation." He eased the door closed and headed down the hallway towards the front entrance.

L paused just outside when he saw Light sitting on a bench and not in the process of walking home. "Light? Is there any reason why you're still here?" L pried.

"Just getting my thoughts in order before I go home." Light said softly with a slightly faraway expression.

"Might I ask what's bothering you, in particular?" L asked.

Light hummed. "You probably noticed back there, but I'm a little upset with the situation and not just because my dad's in the hospital."

"I did, actually." L acknowledged. "I take it you're upset that he didn't listen to you and your family about quitting the case?"

"Yes and no." Light shook his head. "I just…it really annoys me when he exhausts himself because he can't balance work life and home life. Taking a break, getting some sleep, maybe watching an episode of a TV show…it's like none of that exists between when a case opens and when it closes. It's completely, 100% imbalanced and unhealthy but try telling *him* that…and then me and mom have to deal with the consequences of his poor habits. And I feel guilty on top of it because I can't help and whenever I cause problems for him, it only makes the situation worse but despite what he thinks, I can't be on my best behavior for the rest of my *life* ." He sighed, deeply.

L…couldn't understand why Light was confiding in him right now, because that's what this was. Unless all of it was fabricated to an intense degree, Light was being more honest with him in this moment

than he was with his own father. Why in the world would he feel comfortable enough to do that? Though L had decided to befriend Light in order to get the young man to let his guard down, he didn't feel like he'd earned this. Light hasn't known him for that long…could it be his crush on L that made him more open? L honestly didn't know how to respond. "He is a very commendable officer, though."

"Hideki," Light sighed. "Imagine if you were in my position. How would it feel if one of your parents took responsibility for your family's successes but not their failures. If you were the one who had to help take care of the family and look after most of the stuff while someone who doesn't gets to stand apart from it all and take credit for the success of the family unit? And then add the fact that you do actually care about the person you're frustrated with?"

L took a moment to think about that. "I imagine…it would be the worst feeling in the world." If he was neither paid for nor given credit for the cases he closed, he knew that he would be reluctant to engage in cases again in the future. In that way, he did give Light credit for still putting in an effort to uphold his family's image.

Light's lips quirked up. "Just so. Well, I better head home. Dad was right that it's getting late, wouldn't want to risk running into any unsavory characters after dark." He said as he stood up.

"There's less to be worried about with Kira patrolling the streets." L couldn't help commenting, taking in Light's features in the setting sun.

Light paused for a minute and then, "Right." He smirked over his shoulder, looking right back at L. His golden eyes glinted teasingly in the low light. "So when do you think I should meet the other investigators?" Just then, Watari pulled up in the limousine.

"Does tomorrow sound good for you?" L asked, stepping up to the car. Light didn't follow him.

"Tomorrow's Saturday, so it should be fine. I don't have anything planned." Light nodded.

"Alright," L turned around to face him again. "If you want, you or your father can give me your phone number and we'll call you with the details on where to meet up." Acting as if he didn't already have Light's number. That kind of knowledge normally put people on edge, although Light was exceptionally strange in his reactions.

"Actually…" Light's hesitant and nervous tone gained his attention immediately. It was the first time L had heard him like that. "Do you think you could pick me up instead? I'll still give you my number, though!"

“I don’t think that’s necessary.” L responded slowly. “The hotel is close enough to your house for you to walk.”

“You want the place you’re staying to be secret, right? Don’t want Kira to find it…and I could easily be followed, it happened once before,” At this, Light gave L a *look* . “It’d be safer if you picked me up, like you did for Ms. Misora.”

With Light bringing up that they had done the same thing for Naomi Misora, it was difficult for L to further insist that Light was fine walking. If Soichiro wasn’t in the hospital, he could have Light be driven to the hotel by his father, but that was not the case. L mentally shuffled through whether or not he could propose one of the other investigators bringing Light in, but quickly came to the conclusion that they would all question why Watari wasn’t doing it, since that’s how it normally went. Besides, L was under no responsibility to go with Watari to Light’s house, so he agreed and was met with Light’s

wide grin and excited energy.

“Great! I’ll see you then! Wait a sec, I’ll give you my phone number, you can call or text me anytime!” Light made the offer as he rooted around in his pocket. “I think I have a piece of paper and pencil…”

“Just tell me.” L said as he turned back to the car and pulled the rear door open, somehow exhausted all of a sudden. Light rattled off the number and, true to his word, L committed it to memory. He got in the back and closed the door, but then he rolled down the window so he could talk a little more. “See you tomorrow, Light.” He called out.

“See you tomorrow, Hideki.” Light smiled softly and backed up so the car could pull out and he could start his somewhat short walk home.

Through the rear window, he could've sworn he saw Light do a fist pump.

What had he just agreed to?

Chapter End Notes

> So fun fact! Japan apparently lowered their legal age of adulthood in April from 20 years old to 18. In this fic, I’m keeping the legal state of adulthood to the previous number, mostly just because the change was a little too recent for me, I’d rather just keep it to what it’s been for a longer time. At least for this fic. Besides, I think it adds some fun to their relationship if Light isn’t a legal adult yet! ^v^ I’m so hard on L

Meet and Greets

Chapter Summary

> Some meetings happen, some refusals, and Light gets to purge his feelings with his new friend!

Chapter Notes

> I would like to thank iMOCKusALL for the idea for part of this chapter; Light and Matsuda's lunch. Thank you for the very wonderful and cute idea, I hope I did your scene justice! ^v^
> This chapter isn't proofread because I wanted to get it out ASAP. If anyone sees something they think is a mistake, I'd appreciate being told~ On that note, the word count today is truly huge (9900 words) and I've clearly lost my chill when it comes to trying to make the chapters shorter. No chill to be found here, no sir!

Light was waiting excitedly the next morning for L to send Watari to pick him up. *I wonder if L will be with him?* His leg bounced excitedly as he sat on the living room couch. His mom had asked him what he was doing earlier when he first sat down and started waiting, and he'd told her that he was going out with a friend for a while and that they were gonna come by the house.

She'd been a little surprised by that, but it wasn't the first time people from Light's school had come to visit, so she quickly shook it off. Apparently, she was doing some grocery shopping that day so she left soon afterwards, saying she would be gone for a while. That left him and Sayu. Sayu usually spent her weekends either hanging around the house having fun or going out with her friends. It seemed like this was the former, because she swept down the stairs just as their mother was leaving.

"What are you up to, Light?" She exclaimed when she saw him, flopping onto the couch beside him. "I don't usually see you up this early on a Saturday!"

“Oh, morning. Yeah, I like to sleep in on the weekend.” Light acknowledged her with a smile. “I actually have plans today so I had to get up early.”

“Plans?” Sayu sat up a little more. As usual, she was very interested in what other people were doing. “You don’t have plans on the weekend too often, here and there…” She said, leadingly. Subtly wasn’t her strong suit and it was apparent that she wanted him to tell her more. Light obliged.

“A friend wants to take me somewhere.” Light wasn’t sure how to put it without telling her too much, like that the friend was L or that he was trying to get him to join the Kira case, so he settled on that.

“A friend?” Sayu’s whole body jerked at that word and he couldn’t honestly blame her. Ever since he got into high school, he didn’t really *do* friends. “The only person you’ve talked about being a friend lately is…oh! Don’t tell me that Ryuga guy is taking you out?!” She burst out, surprisingly perceptive.

“Uh…well, it’s not exactly like he’s taking me out today, but we did go on a date yesterday.” Light said slowly, thinking it over.

“You say he’s not taking you out but he’s taking you somewhere? That sounds like it to me!” Sayu insisted, very excited.

Hard to argue with logic like that, Light thought. “I guess so…actually, he’s coming to pick me up today or at least he’ll send someone to do it…” Sayu always had such crazy energy that it could feel overwhelming at times, where did she get it from?

“Wait, he’s *picking you up?!* ” If possible, Sayu got even more excited at hearing this information.

“I did say he might just send someone…” Light wryly tried to correct her, but Sayu would not be deterred.

“I’m sure he’ll come himself if he agreed to it.” Sayu dismissed, a huge grin on her face. “Honestly, Light, you really move fast! You never brought anyone home before, so I didn’t think you had it in you! You haven’t even started classes yet and you two are already going on outings together. You’ll get married within the year at this rate.” Light watched his sister’s tirade in amusement, all the while wishing that wooing L could be that easy. But L never made anything easy, sadly.

“I think I’m going to have to disappoint you on the date of our wedding.” Light couldn’t help but laugh. “But I’ll see what I can do about getting you a brother-in-law.”

“See that you do.” Sayu gave him a mock-serious nod. Her expression shifted a little as something clearly occurred to her. “Does Mom and Dad know about Ryuga?”

The mental image of their father sitting next to L and watching the security cameras in their house flashed across Light's mind. "If they know, I didn't tell them." He responded, thoughtfully.

Sayu turned this over in her mind. "Is it a secret? Do you mind them knowing?"

Light felt a little warm at the thoughtful question. When was the last time he could remember a member of his family specifically asking what he wanted? That was kinda sad, actually. Light shook the thought away and smiled at his sister. "I'm not worried about what they think about it, I don't care. It might be annoying if they know but that's about it." He shrugged.

Sayu seemed to take that in before giving him a bright smile. "Well then, I'll leave it for you to tell them, then! I won't bring it up around Mom."

"Thanks, Sayu." Light responded, just as he caught a glimpse of a dark car pulling up outside of their house. It looked like a limosine but shorter than they usually were. "I think my ride's here."

Sayu looked where he was looking and her hands flew up to cover her mouth. "Oh! That's a really expensive looking car, Light! Does your Ryuga have money?"

Light glanced at it again. It was a nice car. While not a full limo, it definitely looked pricey even without him knowing anything about cars. As for L's finances, she hadn't the faintest idea. "Well, I did have my suspicions. This just aligns with them." He answered her, carelessly.

Sayu let out a long whistle. "Are you sure he isn't the actual Hideki Ryuga?"

"I'm sure," Light laughed. "I'll get you to meet him soon."

Strangely enough, Light actually felt at peace in this moment. He couldn't remember the last time he'd just had fun chatting with family, if he ever had. He talked with his sister, his mom, his dad…but this felt different. This wasn't about niceties or taking stock of what's happening…he actually couldn't say what it was about but it felt less weighty with expectations. Lighter than usual.

He didn't feel like he needed to give any specific answer to make

someone happy or satisfy their expectations.

"Awesome!" She burst out, looking truly excited at the prospect. "If you really like him, don't let him get away, Light! It looks like he's a keeper." She said, craning her neck to get an even better look at the vehicle.

Light chuckled as he got up and headed for the front door. "Oh, I won't." Not a chance of it.

"Good luck, Light!" She called out loudly to him and he waved over his shoulder as he closed the door behind him.

As Light made the short walk from his front door to the car, Watari got out of the front seat and languidly moved to one of the rear doors, signaling to him where he was supposed to go. Watari was wearing a hat that hung slightly over his eyes, but he was still easily recognizable. Light smiled at the elderly man as he approached the door he was standing next to, to which Watari silently nodded in greeting.

Light was thinking about whether he should verbally greet the man since they hadn't met in this timeline as Watari opened the door for him, letting Light get his first glimpse inside since the windows were tinted. Those thoughts stopped when he saw who was waiting quietly inside.

"Hello, Light. Good morning." Was L's monotone greeting, the man looking more relaxed than the previous day.

"Morning, Hideki." Light's smile was relieved as he hastened to slip into the back seat. Watari cleanly closed the door and doubled back to the driver's side. "I wasn't sure that you would come yourself."

L hummed. "I wasn't sure that I would come, either. However, it isn't a difficult thing to do. Are you happy?"

"Very!" Light agreed, easily. "I'm glad you came." L's brows furrowed in what Light thought was confusion but why L was confused by his statement, Light didn't know. Watari started the car and they pulled out into the street.

"So where are we going?" Light asked, mostly just making conversation. He didn't really care where they were going.

"For the moment, the investigation is taking place in various hotels. We move every few days for protection." L said, sitting in his usual hunched position.

For the moment, huh? Light recited. Could L be hinting at the eventual reveal that he was currently working on a massive headquarters for the Kira Investigation? Complete with helicopter pads! According to L, the construction was started the moment he decided to work on catching Kira.

L really shines when it comes to thinking ahead, Light couldn't help the feeling of awe that overtook him when he thought about it. He was sure that there was no one alive that could hold a candle to L when it came to preplanning, even Light himself. To start the construction of an *entire skyscraper* before even starting the investigation!

"Light?" L's voice knocked Light out of his musings and he quickly turned back to the man in question.

"Yes?"

"You were zoning out, Light." L observed. "Something wrong?"

"No, no," Light shook his head. "Just thinking about some things. A lot of stuff has been happening lately."

"Understandable." L noted, watching him as always.

The rest of the relatively short drive was spent with Light feeling both stiff and excited. He'd spent so much time with L in the past, but the combination of how much time had passed since then and Light's feelings for him sometimes made him feel a confusing mix of nervous energy. And there was something strangely intimate-feeling about sitting close with L in the back of a car, just the two of them in this small space.

Light managed to keep his calm until they got to the latest hotel. He wasn't surprised that this place was different from the one he'd delivered Naomi to. Light followed L out into the hotel and into the elevator.

L's bravery or maybe his dedication really did strike him as impressive. To take someone that he genuinely believed was Kira and who he thought really wanted to kill him into his current headquarters. He knew L wasn't stupid or crazy, so he had to conclude that he was simply just that willing to take risks to see results and an end to the case. It was very worthy of praise, but L wouldn't take it as such if it came from Light. He'd be more likely to take it as a veiled threat…

"We're here." L said, as they both stepped out of the elevator. He immediately started walking down the hall and Light followed after him.

Light glanced around in interest. “Did you rent out the entire floor?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Light.” L responded, a bit of levity to his tone. “I rented out this floor, the one above, and the one below.” Was L trying to joke with him?

“Right.” Light smiled, wryly. “How absolutely silly of me.”

“Here.” L said, simply. He stopped at a particular door and opened it.

Light recognized the usual set-up. Several more TVs than usual, a coffee table with several chairs arranged around it, and a clutter of paperwork dumped on the table. He recognized the people in this room as easily as he recognized his own family members. They were the people he’d worked with (and fought against) for years and they were some of the last people he saw before he died.

The room was quiet. Aizawa looked deep in thought, seemingly deeply contemplating something. Matsuda, the dedicated man that Light knew him to be, was pouring over a small stack of documents in his hands. Mogi was listening to Naomi whispering about something, which she did with a serious expression on her face. Light froze when his eyes landed on Ukita.

Ukita…he hadn’t thought hard about what would happen if he saw him. He hadn’t seen the man in a long time or even known him that long. The officer hadn’t died long after Light had tentatively joined the investigation the first time. Unlike in the past, when he was just irritated by what was happening, he genuinely mourned the death of the man he’d never gotten to know. Light hadn’t wanted the man to die in either life. From what he remembered and had observed, the man was friendly and determined. He’d been the first one to rush in to

stop the broadcast by the Second Kira, which took guts. So he felt… weird seeing him. He hadn't killed him and he hadn't really known him, but he felt guilt all the same for how the man had ended up. The man looked up and smiled at him.

"Light?"

Light flinched and his head jerked to the side to see who was talking to him. It was L, still hunched right beside him, but looking at Light with a strange expression. "Uh, yeah?" Light asked, feeling breathless.

"Just wondering where Light went off to." L answered, curiosity swimming in his dark eyes.

How long was I zoning out? Light wondered but quickly shook the thought from his head. If there was one thing he was good at, it was pretending everything was fine! "Sorry about that, I'm fine. Just feels weird being here, you know?"

L hummed but didn't respond to the question. "Everyone, please welcome Light Yagami." L announced without raising his voice, but nonetheless getting the attention of everyone in the room. Most of those there hadn't realized that Light and L were there and they all looked up from what they were doing, directing their attention towards the doorway.

"Light, welcome!" Naomi was the first to greet him, getting up from her spot to come over to him. Most of the others followed at a more sedate pace.

"Nice to see you as well, Ms. Misora." Light smiled brightly at her, reaching out to shake her hand.

“Oh, enough of that! Please call me Naomi, after everything you’ve done for me and Raye.” She insisted as she shook his hand.

“I really didn’t do much.” Light said, going for modesty. “I just gave advice, but that’s it. The rest, the police did.” Which was both true and not.

Light really had just profiled the kidnapper’s personality and thought up a way to tease them or someone else who knew something out. It wasn’t like he and Ryuk had staged a daring rescue or anything, the police had really taken the ball he’d tossed them. Then again, he was also pretty sure that L would still be chasing him down as a suspect for the incident if he and Naomi hadn’t pushed the issue. The whole thing really was just a big mess and he was still a little shocked by the events. *But* he was very happy for Naomi, she deserved it after everything he’d put her through before and Raye too.

He hoped they could be happy together since it really did seem like they cared about each other. In his mind’s eye, he saw Naomi asserting that she had nothing else to live for after losing her fiance and Raye, before his death, being willing to do anything he said once Light threatened Naomi’s life. At the same time, he remembered some of the things Naomi had said to him while Raye was missing and knew that there were some issues in their relationship that needed to be addressed if they were really going to be happy - Kira or no Kira.

“Don’t say that. Even Raye agrees that it was your intervention that saved him.” Naomi informed him, gazing at Light with the softest look. “We’re truly grateful.”

Light felt a burst of warmth in his chest as she looked at him like that. He didn’t…he didn’t get thanks like this often. Even when he grew into an adult and took up the moniker of L, he didn’t get much praise or thanks for doing the job. But then again, none of them were exactly

lauded for it, were they?

It wasn't just that. Even though they met a while ago, it wasn't as if they'd had a lot of time to talk to each other. All the same, he felt a strange friendship between them. Maybe it wasn't strange for her, but with his memories of his past life and everything he'd done and being Kira on top of it…it *was* strange. She was fun to talk to, intelligent and kind hearted, and he felt warmth towards her when he saw her. A strange fondness that wasn't there before and seeing the way she interacted with and looked at him, he felt that she was fond of him, as well. It was…nice to have a friend like that. "You're welcome, then. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help you." Naomi smiled brightly in response.

The other investigators gathered in a loose, wide circle around Light, every one taking turns reaching out to shake his hand and offer him a short but genuine greeting. Each told him how pleased they were that he was there. Finally, the person he had been most wishing to see approached him, with far more excitement than any of the others.

"Hi, Light! It's a pleasure to meet you!" Matsuda came up to them and gave a huge smile. Light felt his own smile grow larger in response, as if it were contagious.

Hey, Matsu, Light thought. Here he was, the person Light most looked forward to seeing.

"My name is Touta Matsuda, I work under your father! Well, I mean- we all work under him, but he's been mentoring me." Matsuda rubbed the back of his head, sheepishly. "He's told me a lot about you. I've been anxious to meet you for a long time now!"

Light nearly burst out laughing at the older man's exuberance. It really had been too long! He caught Aizawa side-eyeing Matsuda in

annoyance, but Light himself gave him the most welcoming smile he had. “It’s great to meet you too, Mr. Matsuda! If you’re working closely with my dad, then you must really be something special.” Which was true. Whatever incompetencies Matsuda may or may not have, his father must have seen something significant in him to bring him everywhere he went in the course of his work and take the man under his wing and Light didn’t need to guess to know what that was.

Matsuda made up for his lack of deductive skill with determination and loyalty. And, while Light couldn’t know for sure without checking with his father, he also thought the man highly prized Matsuda’s propensity towards being honest and saying the things that everyone was thinking but no one was willing to verbalize. Light had noticed that a lot while working with the group and so he’s pretty sure his father did too. Most people didn’t seem to appreciate that quality of his, but he knew his dad well enough to know that he would.

Matsuda’s reaction to his words was immediate. “Oh, I’m not really!” He was quick to wave off in a panic. And then came the reverence and respect for Light’s father that the man wore on his sleeve. “I’m just lucky enough to learn from such a great man as your father! I hope I can learn as much as I can from him!”

Light was getting that same feeling that he got when he heard Naomi talking about her life, that itch to get involved and give some of his advice. Like then, he just felt like he couldn’t let it rest. And well, how often did he really hold himself back from doing what he felt like?

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to disagree.” Light shook his head playfully. “You must be something special if my father has taken such an interest in you, especially because you’re probably new to the force. If you don’t think so, then that just means you haven’t realized your true potential yet!”

Matsuda was looking at him in awe now, looking both relieved and touched by Light’s gushing. *Well, just wait! I’m only getting started,*

Light mentally promised him.

“Wait, how did you know he was new?” Naomi asked, showing curiosity rather than suspicion.

“Since I’ve worked with the NPD in the past on cases, I would’ve met him before if he hadn’t joined in the last couple years, which is the last time I’ve worked on a case.” Light informed her, nodding at the other investigators in the room. “Everyone else here, I’ve met at least once. It’s a pleasure to see you all again.”

“Oh! I see now why L was so interested in having you join the investigation!” Matsuda smiled widely, soothing Light’s being with its presence. “You’re very observant, I didn’t even think of that.” He put his hand on the back of his head and closed his eyes as he said this. Light got the distinct impression he was feeling bad about himself.

“Just because you didn’t think of it doesn’t mean you aren’t intelligent.” Light commented, walking past him and wandering around the room.

“Oh, well, I’m not really so good at making deductions…” Matsuda tried to let him down. “I don’t know if I’ll actually be able to help the investigation that much.”

“Of course you will!” Light declared loudly, causing several people to startle and look for him. “I can tell already, just by seeing you. You’re a dedicated and persevering person, it’s written all over your face. Someone like that would be an asset to any investigation, deductive ability or no.”

“I…” At this Matsuda looked shocked, as if he didn’t know what to say, and he wasn’t the only one. The room in general looked surprised

at Light's pronouncement.

I can understand why. Light thought, glancing quickly about the room in mild disinterest. *That was a very forceful way of saying it. And maybe some of their surprise is that they expected me to ignore Matsu for the most part.*

Most of the investigators wore their shock openly, but L, who still stood nearby the door, was peering at him speculatively. It was hard to tell exactly what *he* was feeling, but he probably didn't know what to make of Light's behavior, either.

"I…thank you, Light." Matsuda managed, flushing a little with the praise. He started to look like he was getting a fire lit under him. "I'll do my best not to let you down!"

"You won't." Light smiled, his voice carrying with it a calm certainty. Then he deflected. "So what were you guys planning to do for the investigation this morning? Please, don't let me distract you from it."

"We honestly weren't planning anything big." Aizawa informed him, friendly in a way that Light had become unused to seeing in their last couple years working together. "Our investigation has reached a standstill and we're currently looking into alternative suspects."

"You mean, people besides myself?" Light asked blithely, merely smiling at him.

"Ah, well, about that…" Aizawa responded in surprise, not seeming to know what to say to Light. He glanced in annoyance out of the corner of his eye in L's direction. Or maybe the emotion was detestation.

“It’s okay, I’m just joking. I know I’m a suspect, but I’m not upset about it. You’re just doing your jobs and I’m sure L has a good reason for any of his suspicions.” Light inserted. Aizawa relaxed at that and gave Light an admiring look.

“It’s okay, Light!” Matsuda burst out, taking several steps closer. “No one here really believes that you’re Kira! We all believe in you and so does your father!” He asserted, heatedly. The others around the room either nodded or gave their verbal agreement and they looked like they meant it.

Interesting… Light contemplated. *This IS what I wanted, but I would’ve thought that my confession of being a Kira supporter would trouble them a bit, make them more unsure of my innocence until I could cajole them. Unless…did L not tell them about that?*

Light chanced a glance at L, who was still observing the room at large. Then their eyes met, L’s dark black voids against Light’s bright golden orbs, and their gazes stayed connected.

He really didn't, did he? Light wondered in amazement. *Is he holding onto it for a better time to make the information known? When it can do more damage, maybe? Or is it just part of the countless bits of information L has decided to keep to himself and not let the other investigators know about? Lone wolfing it again, L?*

After the moment passed, Light returned his attention to the situation at hand. “Thanks, Mr. Matsuda,” Light held up his hands and gave the man a thankful smile. “But I’m really alright. I definitely don’t mind, so don’t worry about it.”

“That’s good to hear, Light.” Aizawa commended him. “You’re just as mature as ever. Anyhow, like I said, we’re not doing much. Just looking over profiles, both for civilians and police officers, and

discussing their qualities that may or may not align with what we think Kira's are."

Light smiled at the man on the outside, but on the inside, his mind was turning that over furiously. *Is L giving them busy work? I suppose that I don't know that's what it is, but he's convinced I'm Kira. I've known him a long time, he hyperfocuses when he believes something to be the truth and ignores other routes. I have a hard time believing that he would be actively investigating other suspects after he truly set his sights on me. Maybe he assigned this to the investigators because they were pressuring him to look elsewhere for a suspect. Or maybe it wasn't even L's idea and the investigators are taking it upon themselves to supply him with another suspect…*

"Well then, since I'm here for the morning, mind if I help you with that?" Light asked. In any other investigation, that would be a huge conflict of interest that wouldn't be allowed. The prime suspect in an investigation helping point out other suspects in said investigation?? Nothing about L's investigation was above board, was it?

"That'd be great! You'd be a really big help." Matsuda said, excitedly.

"We need all the help we can get." Aizawa smiled.

"Great!" Light scooted over to one of the seats and calmly started rifling through the mass of papers on the table.

"I'm afraid this might prove somewhat boring for you, Light." L piped up for the first time since they'd entered the room, walking towards the group and squatting in his usual way on the only rolling chair in the room. Probably his designated chair.

"I don't think anything you can throw at me will be as boring as I find

school to be." Light said, good-naturedly.

Most of these profiles are of younger people, Light observed. He decided to quickly look over as many profiles as he could reach and look for common threads between them. After all, these individuals had to be picked for a reason, even if there were quite a few of them.

L gave an acknowledging hum in response to what he said and settled down to stare at Light as he filtered through the profiles. He watched Light with his usual intensity, apparently deciding that further explanations weren't necessary.

Interestingly, there seemed to be very little tying these individuals together, which might've been expected of such a large group. Still, Light found it difficult to find anything common between them besides their ages, which ranged from their early teens to mid-twenties.

There were *several* members of the police among the profiles. Light hadn't at all been expecting that, but it made sense to him. L had always been suspicious and secretive towards the Japanese police at large, but with Light's having used Ryuk to plant a Kira pin in the police station, he's given L a much more tangible reason to think Kira might either be one of them or working with an officer, at least.

And , Light thought, reaching back in his thoughts to previous interactions they've had. *My stunt with Mr. Tailor might have accomplished the same thing.* He didn't think it would be overthinking to suspect that the inside knowledge he displayed on who Tailor was, limited though it was, and L's entire plan with him would arouse L's suspicions towards Kira's access to the police.

Light didn't know how many people in the police were ever in on that particular plan, but the point was that no one outside of the police

and L himself would probably have been aware of it and yet Kira had known. And who knows if anything else Light or Kira had done or said would have reinforced that link to insider information that he just didn't know about because for all his power, he couldn't see inside L's head?

So in short, Light could understand why a number of officers, both high and lower ranking, were in attendance on the table. L probably still had much to make sense of regarding what Kira did and did not know. Most of the other profiles were students, though. And that caused Light some confusion, as well. They ranged from middle school to college age and looked much like a mishmash.

Suddenly, something came to mind. In his previous life, Light recalled hacking into the police database and reading that L suspected Kira of being a student. Once the thought made itself known, he couldn't refrain from quickly flicking through all of the papers again and looking at them from that point of view. If L came to that suspicion this time as well, then that might explain some things.

Almost as if he'd read Light's mind, L chose that moment to speak again. "Have you noticed something, Light?"

Light weighed whether or not to answer, then shrugged. "Most of these suspects are really young and I was wondering why. And…most of them are grade school or college students."

"Wow, Light, you noticed that fast." Matsuda complimented him. Light beamed at him, causing the man to blush.

"Indeed." L said quietly, taking Light in with his usual unreadable expression. "You came to that conclusion very quickly and you are correct. You see, I've suspected Kira of being a student for some time now although there is a possibility that he is a young adult working in

the police force."

The last part caused more than a few irritated looks at L from some of the other investigators. Loyalty between police officers was both common and strong even when they hadn't worked closely together, Light knew. It was probably causing some contention with some of them that L thought Kira might be police, even if he wasn't suspecting them specifically.

“Why exactly do you suspect Kira of being a student?” Light inquired.

“The young tend to be the most idealistic,” L started, calmly. “While I have no concrete evidence that they are young, I believe Kira’s actions to be a twisted version of idealism and older children to younger adults tend to suit that role. However, because of some of Kira’s suspect knowledge and because police officers could also fill that idealistic role, I’ve included a few of them that could neither be cleared nor discarded for other reasons.” He explained.

Light hummed. That reasoning was different than what he’d told him in the past timeline, but he decided that it made sense. He didn’t kill on a distinctive schedule anymore, both by nature and by design. He knew that it was the schedule in his past life that made him so predictable in his kills and therefore more suspect, but it was also just nearly impossible to write new names in that way. Before, he could spend a lazy evening at home watching the news and writing a litany of names…but that wasn’t how he did things now.

Now, he investigated each person separately and as a result, he couldn’t just bang out a bunch of names on his off hours. The fact that Ryuk helped with lots of the investigations by spying on people who couldn’t see him, often during school hours, also meant that research didn’t observe strict hours based on his own availability.

Plus, his stunt with Taylor probably threw L for a loop. In his last lifetime, there was no way Light could have found that information unless he was involved in L's plan or the arrest of Taylor, so of course he was reluctantly broadening his view of who could be Kira. Still…

Oh, L. Light secretly smiled. *If push comes to shove, how are you going to explain how I had access to that information if you try to pin be with being Kira?*

Light nodded but chose not to respond to L's theories. Instead, he turned back to Matsuda and started chatting with him again. He didn't pay much attention to it, but he did catch the other investigators still looking surprised at how close he was sitting to Matsuda and how much they were talking. L, too, was peering at him in suspicion and curiosity.

The majority of the morning went by like that, with Light drinking up whatever information the group yielded and cozying up to his old friend. It was great to be with Matsuda again and seeing him so young…especially because the man really needed some appreciation. At some point, Aizawa tried to admonish Matsuda by telling him he shouldn't talk Light's ear off when he got excited about something, but Light politely told him where to go and then turned back to Matsuda, gently urging him to continue.

At another point, Matsuda got antsy and asked L for something he could do and L disinterestedly directed him towards a small kitchen area where he could get him a drink. Matsuda looked disappointed but did leave to get it, coming back with two drinks. "I thought you might like one, too." Matsuda said, setting the second cup of coffee down in front of Light.

Light's face brightened up considerably from the thoughtful frown it had been stuck in. "Thank you. That's very thoughtful of you." He said, warmly.

Matsuda's cheeks colored brightly at the compliment. “Really, it was nothing special. Anyone could have done it.”

“But not everyone did and I appreciate it.” Light insisted, not letting him look down on himself even a little. “And you thought about what I would like, that’s so sweet!” He gushed, only making the other man’s face go more red as he fidgeted in delighted nervousness.

The morning passed pleasantly because of that and when it came closer to noon, Light reluctantly decided that it was time for him to go. No, he told L and the other investigators when they asked, he wasn’t interested in joining them on the case now. He maintained utmost politeness, but the rejection was clear and taking L’s offer to have Watari drive him home, he left the room. He knew it wouldn’t end like this, hoped it wouldn’t end like this, but he couldn’t help but worry that his rejection was too firm.

But it was L he was dealing with. He shouldn’t have been worried.

~ ❶ ~

This was getting frustratingly odd. The whole situation seemed perfectly normal on the surface, but it all felt so strange. Light gave off a great appearance of being an ordinary college student who didn’t want to get involved in something dangerous, L was sure he’d convinced everyone else of it. But that image didn’t suit Light at all.

And paradoxically, the more Light refused a position on the team, the more pressure L wanted to exert to make him do so. It felt as if he were losing to Kira, even though he couldn’t fathom what Light was thinking. However, he was finally given something he could work with! Light had denied the desire to catch Kira, showed no interest in

clearing his name, and continually rejected the opportunity to work with L himself. Each and every one of those abnormal deviations irked L and caused him to need a few moments to gain back his equilibrium. The last, especially.

Everything L had seen and therefore speculated so far said that if Light was given the chance to work with the Great L, he would grab it in an instant with both hands. Whether he was an *innocent* teen with nothing to do with Kira or Kira himself, both versions of Light should have leaped at the chance! Light supposedly has a crush on L, both in person and as an icon, clearly wanting to be around him even before he knew who L was.

As Kira…the man should want to keep an eye on him and the case. He knew that Kira had to be arrogant to act like a god, but it took more arrogance than he was willing to attribute to Light for him to not fear the investigators catching his trail. Surely, he would want to watch them all…but he didn't seem worried about it.

L had initially come around to the idea of extending the offer to Light as both a way of watching his suspect more closely more often and also of gaining another piece of evidence for himself that Light was indeed suspicious since, while it wasn't too unreasonable that an innocent person would want to prove their innocence by joining the team, he found it more likely that an innocent person would be comfortable letting the police handle it. If Light showed a strong interest in clearing his name by his own hands…well, it wouldn't convince anyone else, but it would give L that extra assurance that he was on the right track. However…

Light…was inescapably different than he had expected. Getting Light to agree to join the group, while initially starting as a trap, had now become a matter of pride.

"Mr. Matsuda, I believe you may be useful for something, after all." L muttered under his breath, staring at the door Light had just exited

out of.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Matsuda turned to him in confusion.

“Nothing, it’s just that I’ve thought of a way that you might be useful to the case.” L responded, blithely.

His suspect’s latest oddity was his strangely friendly relationship with Matsuda. Light was perfectly polite towards all of the other investigators, but he was abnormally interested in him, of all people.

Perhaps it was that he smelled weakness? L wondered to himself. *Mr. Matsuda is the most easily lead member of our little group and he follows Mr. Yagami around like a lost puppy, so it’s likely he immediately tagged Matsuda as someone he could manipulate and get more on his side.* ***Not*** *that the other investigators aren’t also on the fence about this.*

Whatever the reason, Light had been acting so strange in regards to Matsuda, practically being all over him. The others started chatting about it the moment Light left but even Matsuda didn’t know why Light was being so nice to him. L was *very* interested in knowing why he was behaving that way, himself. But first. To make use of the situation…

“Really?” Matsuda burst out in excitement. “Yes! I’ll do anything! Whatever you need!”

"Then let's get you suited up." L said, pressing a button on his computer to call for Watari.

"Why did you ask me out for lunch?" Light asked, curiously. He glanced casually around the restaurant they were in.

This was something that had never happened in the previous timeline, not even after they'd been working together for years. A lunch hangout just between the two of them…Then again, few things were going the way they had in the previous timeline, so it's only natural. Still, he found himself curious as to how it came about.

Light had only been back at his house for two hours before he got the phone call from an unknown number. He'd hesitantly answered the call, curiosity getting the better of him once again. If anything, he thought it would be L or something, but hearing Matsuda's nervous voice made him startle. Of all the things he hadn't expected…

Even more surprising, instead of being about the case, Matsuda wanted to see if Light would like to grab some lunch together. The investigation, Matsuda told him with audible dejection, didn't really need him right now and since he knew Light was free that day, did he want to grab some food? Apparently, he'd called Light's dad and gotten his number from him.

Light hadn't been sure why Matsuda made that decision, but he'd agreed, which brought them to where they were now. Since then, he'd got a working theory about what might be going on. L's efforts to strongarm him into joining the investigation has once again proved unsuccessful and Light had shown himself to like Matsuda, so L had probably recruited the man to help convince him to join.

At times like this, Light thought back to when Matsuda snuck into Yotsuba HQ and acted his way out of a really tough spot. First, by pretending to be a manager trying to get a contract and then by pretending to be drunk and falling to his death. With that, he had far more respect for Matsuda's acting skills. He wasn't at L or Light's level

of acting ability, but he was decent and could adjust on the fly. Plus, he beat out Misa and she appeared in dramas, so…

"Oh, just trying to get to know you a little better, Light." Matsuda laughed nervously, answering his earlier question. "I had nothing better to do and you really seem like a nice guy." His eyes popped open when he realized what he might've just said and hastened to explain. "Wait, I didn't mean to imply that I'm just wasting time here or that if I had something better, I would be here! I–"

Light laughed brightly, cutting him off. "It's alright, I get it! Don't worry, I'm not offended. Having lunch with someone is a nice way to kill a couple of hours, especially if you're not needed elsewhere."

Matsuda looked relieved at Light's words, despite the fact that Light had an inner certainty that that was not the case in this situation. He didn't need his knowledge of the previous timeline to know that, while not having the unwavering conviction of Light's father, Matsuda wouldn't just abandon the investigation even just for an afternoon. He always wanted to support others, always wanted to please, always wanted to be useful.

No, once he'd had time to think about it, this was probably an L-related incident.

"I imagine it must be pretty stressful, being part of the Kira Investigation." Light offered. He'd witnessed first-hand the stress that it put them all under and just how many of the men involved had breakdowns.

"Yeah, it's a big responsibility. Most of the time, I still can't believe that I was actually chosen to be on the team." Matsuda admitted. "If it's okay…can I ask…is that the reason you don't want to join the investigation?"

Light paused. Not because the question was unexpected. It was literally the most expected question he could have gotten. No, the reason was that he actually stopped to consider his answer.

In actuality, he did want to join the investigation, but that was because it would bring him closer to L. That much reasoning would be obvious to both him and L, though he wasn't sure about the other investigators.

But beyond that? Light wasn't interested in the investigation at all and it wasn't just because he'd already done it once before. He had no strong reason to do it besides for L. In the past, he'd wanted to keep an eye on things because he didn't want to be caught. He genuinely and thoroughly didn't care this time if he was. What he cared about was getting closer to L and a few of the other people he feels he didn't appreciate enough before, like the man before him now. If he got caught and was executed, that would put an end to that goal, but that was about it. He certainly wasn't scared of dying.

And he'd also considered it as part of his training for his future, which of course would be as an officer or a detective. Something in that general direction. It was all he'd ever prepared to do his whole life and possibly the only thing he really knew. It was the reason he'd helped his dad in previous cases, it was all practice for his future. Laying the groundwork for future goals was something he was exceedingly good at.

But he didn't want that anymore.

It wasn't that he loathed the idea of being a detective. How could he? He associated it with L and when he was investigating criminals, he felt more in his element. It *was* his element. But maybe he wanted something different with his life this time, especially since he wasn't sure how much that goal had ever really been *his* . How much of

himself had he never realized he'd lost..?

"It's not because of the responsibility, I've dealt more often with worse responsibilities." Light said, really not wanting to lie to him.

Matsuda started looking really concerned and he leaned forward a bit across the table. "Then what's the problem?" Crap, Matsuda was looking at him like a puppy, with those big innocent eyes of his. "You can tell me, Light. I'll hear you out."

Pressured and trapped, that's what Light was starting to feel. It was an unusual feeling for him, these days.

He could lie to the man, he could do that…but he didn't want to do that to his relationships again. Falling back into old patterns of pleasing those around him and avoiding confrontation by lying about his thoughts and feelings…he was raised to see it as a good thing, but in the end, it destroyed the quality of his relationships and made even the people closest to him unaware of who he truly was. It caused a divide between him and others, made him feel less close to them and allowed him to look down on them. He'd just slipped further and further from there…

He didn't want to do it again. Especially not with Matsuda, the man who had always been kind and supportive to him. He'd been on Light's side more routinely than even his own father had, so this was one relationship he especially didn't want to ruin with needless lies. Matsuda didn't care about superficial things, anyway.

"I don't…" Light paused, and then started again. "I don't want to say anything disparaging about my father or about our relationship." And he really, truly didn't. He was worried about Matsuda's reaction, given that he was intensely loyal to his father.

Not just that, he also didn't want to make Matsuda too uncomfortable the first day they met. He was so good to him their entire past lives (shooting him notwithstanding), Light would feel like a huge jerk if he tried to agitate him *immediately* . Then again, Matsuda had always been accepting and willing to listen. Lying to his face about his reasons for not really wanting to be a detective anymore when the truth could eventually come out anyway was also…

At his words, surprise took over Matsuda's expression before something like an uncomfortable understanding took its place. "I know having a policeman for a father, especially one so dedicated and with a high position would be difficult…" Matsuda offered hesitantly, looking genuinely sad about it but still not getting it.

“He’s never been there for me.” Light whispered, staring down at the table.

"What?" Matsuda startled.

"He has *never* been there for me." Light said, a little louder but still quiet. His calm probably eery, given the subject matter. "From as long as I can remember, it's been me, my mom, and my baby sister with frequent *visits* from my dad. His work has always been what he dedicated most of his life to. If he can't get his mind out of a case, he doesn't even come home."

Light didn't know how to feel about actually saying all of this. He'd talked a little to Ryuk and he'd thought about it a lot so he knew how he felt…he'd been tiptoeing around this with others, getting close but never quite tackling the iceberg of his feelings. He didn't feel relieved talking about it now and he wasn't sure if that was weird.

"It must've been hard…" Matsuda did genuinely look like he was mourning with him. "But you know, he probably does his job so well to protect his family." Light knew what he was trying to do. He was trying to comfort Light while trying to get him to understand his father better, but…

"He never asked us about that, he made the decision on his own." Light stared at the table. "Whether or not he's doing it for us, he's a husband and father; his decisions affect us a lot and he made them on his own. He *continues* to make them on his own. Mom has to just put up with the pressure that her husband's job puts on her and the family, my sister barely has him in her life, the only way I can feel close to my father is by trying to make him proud, and we *all* have to worry endlessly about his safety. He barely comes home as it is and we still have to worry if there'll be a day when he never comes home!"

Light took a deep breath and looked up at Matsuda, who was staring at him in surprise. "I don't want to sound ungrateful for how hard my dad works, at his job and for his family, but it has felt like we're on our own since I was a little kid. And…it feels like a lot of the time, he trivializes how hard it is for us. I *know* he doesn't mean it that way, but he doesn't understand just *how* much pressure this life puts on all of us. We don't need a police officer, we need a father."

"My accomplishments?" Light said, his voice faint. "I've been the *repository* for my dad's ambitions for me since I was a little kid. Everything he wanted me to be…but when am I allowed to decide what I want without him standing over my shoulder and being disappointed when I don't do something just the way he would. Different is the same thing as bad, that's what dad taught me…but I'm not him, I *am* different. So I guess he'll think I'm bad…"

A hand shot out and grabbed Light's on the table. Golden brown eyes shot up from where they had drifted back to the table and came directly into contact with Matsuda's determined gaze. The other man's dark eyes had a rare but familiar gleam in them, the look that he got when he was determined to do something and nothing would stop him.

“Stop that, Light.” He said, stonily. “You are *not* bad and your dad won’t think that, either.”

“You don’t know that.” Light said, hesitantly. It was true, wasn’t it?

He didn’t feel the personal need to ascribe to ideas like “good” or “bad” anymore, not really. They were human constructs and even more fragile than their creators. Shinigami didn’t really have things like moral qualms, hangups, or values. However, he could acknowledge that according to human ideas, he was probably very bad. He wanted to protect people, but he understood that in anything other than a completely Utilitarian view, he was probably pure evil. He doubted anyone but L would accept him if they really knew him, even Matsuda. He did shoot him when he saw too much of him, after all.

“I do know that, Light.” Matsuda insisted. “And not because of who your father is. I’ve only met you today, but I can already tell that you’re an introspective and thoughtful person. You think about others. That’s all I need to know that you’re not a bad person.” His eyes were practically flaming with determination to defend Light, even from himself.

Light blinked in surprise, unsure how to respond. That was probably the first time anyone he’d worked with previously, besides L, said something like that. Specifically, that he was who he was independent of his father. Before, the entire team he’d worked with had been loyal to and defended him explicitly because of their loyalty to their chief and how it extended to Light by association. For Matsu of all people to be saying it now…

Things really have changed, haven’t they? Light smiled, softly. Moving to hold Matsuda’s hands back in a soft gesture, Light thanked him from the bottom of his heart. “Thank you. It…feels really nice to hear that.

And to talk about it, too."

"I'm glad." Matsuda smiled, before looking a little nervous. "If you don't mind my asking, if you have those kinds of strong feelings towards your father, why have you been visiting him at the station multiple times a week lately?"

"Part of it is that I've been worried about him since this case started. Part of how angry I am is because of how worried we all are." Light said. "But more than that, I've realized recently just how bad it is that I don't have much of a relationship with my dad. I thought that if I could find excuses to come by more often, I might see him just a little bit more, *talk* to him just a little bit more. Oftentimes he's so busy when I come by that I don't see him at all and have to hand off whatever I brought to someone else."

Light huffed. "I'm used to that. It's a numbers game, you see. If I come so often, then he has to be free to see me at least some of those times and I can see him." Light's voice cracked a little and he hurried to clear his throat, flushing a little in embarrassment and trying to pretend like it hadn't happened. "I've been hoping that, little by little, I could build up something just a tiny bit better between us. And then maybe I could stand to tell him the things that I know he'll have to find out about eventually. Things like how I don't want to be a detective anymore and how I don't want a wife." He glanced at Matsuda as he said that last part.

Matsuda looked his usual level of nervous but not surprised. "About that…" He started, hesitantly.

"Just as I thought, you guys know." Light huffed with a smile.

"You knew we did?" Matsuda asked, looking shocked now.

“Well, I was definitely hitting on…what do you guys call him? Ryuzaki? I know him as Ryuga. Anyway, I was definitely hitting on him and I’m sure even he noticed, so I was thinking that you guys might’ve been told after that. It wasn’t a sure thing, but it made sense.” Light shrugged, doing his best to make it seem like he knew nothing of any surveillance cameras that may or may not be in his home right now.

“Oh, I see.” Matsuda’s expression cleared up. “Still, I’m sorry, Light. About the invasion of your privacy that that was.”

“It’s okay.” Light responded. “Well, looks like the cat’s out of the bag on that one.” He chuckled under his breath. “That still leaves a lot more I need to talk to my dad about, though. At any rate, that was why I’ve been visiting the station so often these days. I just…wanted something more with him, I guess. Something better than I can ever remember having. I wanted him to know me, even just a little bit.”

“Light…” Matsuda tried, looking so very sad.

“And that’s why I’d like the two of us to be friends.” Light didn’t let him be sad. “I haven’t known you for a long time, but I already really like you, Mr. Matsuda.”

“Oh-um, by liking me, do you mean..? Because I’m flattered and you’re very attractive, Light, but-And it’s not like-but it’s inappropriate! Right! For an investigator to be-and your father’s coworker too! You’re so young, that would definitely be-” Matsuda hurriedly stumbled over his words and Light had to fight down the urge to fall over laughing.

“Inappropriate, right?” Light finished for him, laughing a little. “No, that’s not what I meant. I really meant that I wanted to be friends.” He reassured him, fondly. “I want more meaningful and honest

relationships moving forward, with both friends and family, and I think you'll be honest with me. I think you're a great guy that I'd be lucky to have in my life and a really good friend. I wouldn't want to pressure you or anything, but…"

"Light, I-" Matsuda looked choked up, but an excited smile quickly spread across his face. "I'd be honored to be your friend! I don't know if I'll be that great a friend, but I'll do my best!"

"None of that!" Light laughed. "You put yourself down too much, Mr. Matsuda. I think you're far better than you think you are!"

"Oh! Please, call me Touta!" Matsuda fumbled, losing a bit of his steely determination in order to return to the goofy guy he usually was. "I feel like we've gotten much closer!"

"I couldn't do that." Light fell back on his experience with politeness and familiar addresses. "You're older and more experienced than me, after all!" He smiled in a joking manner.

"Older maybe!" Matsuda smiled in the same way back at him. "I insist. I already call you Light."

"Alright then." Light agreed. "Thanks for listening to me go off like that." *And for accepting me afterwards.*

"I was happy to." Matsuda assured him brightly, sounding as if he would truly have liked nothing better. Light felt something warm blooming in his chest.

They stayed in the restaurant for quite a bit longer after that, eating

and chatting about any amount of things. Eventually, they both had to leave and they waved goodbye to each other before parting ways.

Light let out a deep breath as he started back home. As he did, he felt much lighter. Somehow, that discussion felt like he'd purged a lot of negativity he hadn't fully realized he'd been carrying around with him. Matsuda really was the best. He always knew how to provide everything Light needed and he'd make sure to appreciate him the way he deserved this time around.

He'd left Ryuk at home, so he was sure his friend would be waiting excitedly back at the house, wanting to hear all about it. Ryuk would probably start plotting if he could get L to be jealous by somehow leaking that he had a lunch date with Matsuda. Light thought the answer to that would be "probably not", since the other man didn't seem to be even slightly sharing his feelings yet. Just confused. He'd probably just be suspicious if he heard about it.

Ah well, he had a friend to go home and tell all about it.

Hard Truths

Chapter Summary

There's a reckoning here for Light's father and basically people are hearing Light for the first time.

Chapter Notes

I'm alive! And I'm tired. But I'm also alive!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Touta Matsuda left the restaurant that afternoon not really being able to identify everything he was feeling after the discussion he'd had.

He really liked Light, so he couldn't stand seeing him so upset. *I guess everyone really does have their own stuff going on,* Touta couldn't help but think to himself. It was something he'd heard a lot, but it really felt true now.

If anyone would have asked him before, he would've said that Light seemed to be the perfect kid and have the perfect life. Now, Light was just as great as he'd always seemed, but Touta could understand now that he'd been going through a lot. A lot of stuff that no one ever knew of.

Touta felt honored that Light trusted him of all people to talk to, especially since they'd only officially met that day, but he reminded himself that it might just be that Light didn't have a lot of other people he felt he could talk to. It made him sad to think about, exactly because of how nice Light was. He found himself worrying about how the chief's family was doing.

He'd been worrying about how the chief and his family were since this whole case started, but never more so than now. He'd felt like this case was putting them through a lot. At first, because of how

dangerous and stressful this was for the chief and how that would trickle down to his family life, but now Touta realized that there had been a heavy strain there long before. Touta glanced around nervously, checking the streets for something.

He briefly dared to think that this case might be a good thing, then. He thought that at least it was dragging all of these problems out of the woodwork so they could handle them, but he quickly shook it from his head. He shouldn't think that it was ever good for people to be upset!

He just made it around the corner and out of view of the café they'd gone to when a sleek car pulled up in front of him and Touta let out a relieved smile. At the same time, he was nervous knowing he would have to face the fact that Light's private feelings would soon be known to the whole investigation team.

If I'd known Light would admit to those things, I never would have agreed to this. He thought, depressed. He felt like he was betraying the trust Light put into him with this, but he'd only meant to help!

Watari got out of the car and opened the door on Touta's side, urging him to get in. Surprisingly, Ryuzaki was in the back seat waiting for him. Touta would've expected him to be waiting back at the hotel.

"Did Light inform you of why he refuses to join the investigation?" Ryuzaki said, skipping a greeting.

"Oh! Yes…" Touta fumbled with the wire underneath his shirt, but Ryuzaki held a hand up to stop him.

"Please keep the wire on until we get back to the hotel, where Watari can remove it." He said. "The others were listening to the

conversation in real time, but there will be a recording of it for us to listen to when we get back." The group lapsed into an awkward silence as they made their way back, allowing Touta to think for a bit and become more agitated.

"I…" Touta started nervously, before clearing his throat. "Do you still think Light might be involved with Kira? I know you said you weren't anymore, but…" But he drew off. How did he justify the fact that he was questioning if what L had told him was the truth? He was supposed to trust Ryuzaki and his team! He couldn't help but wonder about it though, with how Ryuzaki was acting.

Ryuzaki didn't even glance at him as he answered. "I assure you, I am sufficiently convinced that Light Yagami is innocent. I merely believe that he would be a great asset to this very important case and, as such, I am willing to go to extreme lengths to obtain his agreement."

Touta couldn't help but feel uneasy as the other man said that. He got what he was trying to say, but…it was hard to describe, but the words didn't sound like he meant them. Touta didn't feel comforted by them, like he thought he should.

Touta felt uneasy about it. He didn't want to keep pushing, especially since Ryuzaki hadn't said he still suspected Light of being Kira, but leaving the conversation there still made him uncomfortable. He'd been worried about Light before without really having met him and now that he had, he couldn't stand the idea of hanging back and letting Ryuzaki think those things about Light.

Everything was so unfair to Light. First he's suspected of being Kira, then his father is hospitalized, and now he has his personal secrets revealed to everyone. Touta swore to himself then and there that even if he couldn't do much for him, he would always do his best to stand by Light and support him. If Light needed something, he would be by his side in an instant and not because of the Chief, but for Light himself.

But still, it was so unfair. Light was such a sweet kid…

~ ❶ ~

Soichiro Yagami was a stubborn man. He knew this about himself and this trait had served him well in his career. He had a very respectable job and, after decades of hard work and dedication, a high rank. His career was something that he was passionate about and put much energy towards. He was very highly regarded, far exceeding his actual title. He had an amazing group of men and he'd only recently realized the depth of their loyalty during this case.

He'd been blessed with a soft-spoken, quiet, and loving woman as his wife. He'd known he wanted to marry Sachiko from shortly after they started dating, and was certain that she'd make a great wife. She was a supportive spouse and a loving mother to their children. She took care of the family and accepted her husband's demanding job and frequent absences without complaint.

And then he had been blessed further with two beautiful children; a sweet daughter and a strong son. His family was an enormous source of pride and an additional motivation to do his job well. He wanted to create a safer world for his children to go out in every day. From the moment he was married, his job wasn't just his dream but also his greatest act of care for the people he loved. However, this same job made him somewhat removed from his own family and their daily lives, especially recently.

Soichiro had always viewed his son as perfect. Really, ever since the boy was quite young. Light was a beautiful child and as he grew older, he showed himself to be both mature and talented in several areas. Light was unfailingly polite to anyone Soichiro introduced him to, impressing many of his colleagues. He was great at school and had an equally excellent memory. Light was a dutiful son, a dedicated

student, and a responsible older brother and role model for his sister. Soichiro had no doubt that his son would be very successful one day, even outdoing himself. He'd tried to impart a strong sense of justice into both of his children and Light had said that he aspired to be like his father from young.

Looking back, Light might have always been a standout in his family. Unlike his sister, Light had been born with the light brown hair of Soichiro's own father and it stood out as much as his manner did.

For how long… Soichiro wondered to himself, leaning back in his hospital bed. *Have I been misunderstanding my son?*

This vision of who his son was that he'd had in his head, how had reality strayed so far from it without him noticing? When had he stopped knowing his son?

When Ryuzaki contacted him at the hospital, letting him know what was going on with the investigation, Soichiro insisted on being there when they listened to a tape and a car was sent to retrieve him. The hospital made a fuss about it, but they couldn't keep him there so he got in the car that came for him and left.

He's never been there for me. Those are the words Light had said and they hit the worst. More than realizing that his son felt pressured to be someone else, it hurt to hear that Light felt left alone. He was a father and a police officer, and yet he couldn't even make his son feel safe. He'd failed at both roles.

Never been there… Soichiro stared off into space as his mind went back years and years into the past. He remembered…the day his son was born, his first child…

He remembered how much love he'd felt that day, as a little miracle was placed in his arms. Love for his wife, the wonderful woman he'd married that had now given him this beautiful child. Love for his baby, small and perfect and resting in his arms, ready to be protected. Love for his growing family, that made him feel like the luckiest man alive.

It was painful to think back to that at the moment, feeling like he'd failed that family that he had felt so grateful for. Even now, he wasn't sure where he had gone wrong, but he knew that he had. Soichiro would be lying if he said he hadn't wondered many times during his life if he was a good father. He tried his best for his family, but he was aware of his inadequacies. Or at least, he'd thought he was aware of them.

He was consumed by his work, he never came home anymore, and he was barely present in his children's lives. He knew these things and while he accepted them as facts of his life, he felt guilty about them. But hearing Light talk, Soichiro felt more deeply than ever that he had failed even more as a husband and father than he could've hoped to grasp on his own.

I've never been there for him… When Light had said that, it had felt like a punch to his gut. He wanted to deny it! To rush to the café right at that moment despite his poor health and shake Light, insisting to him that he should know he could come to his father whenever he needed him!

But could he?

Just as quickly as the desire came to him, he found himself coming to another thought. Could he really tell his son that he could come to him for anything? He'd told his son that several times before and had fully believed its truth when he said it, but now he was asking himself if they were really just careless words, without true meaning.

His whole family knew how busy he was. Would Light really feel like he could interrupt his father's work for whatever problem he was having? What brought that even more into question was Light bringing up the fact that although he'd been visiting the station so much lately, Soichiro often wasn't available to talk, even though seeing him was what Light was secretly after.

I had no idea that was why… Soichiro realized, heavily. He'd never asked his son why he was coming around so often lately. He'd wondered privately, but he was so busy and it was honestly harmless, so he decided that he would wait until everything calmed down to ask him about it.

Though he'd questioned his quality as a husband in the past, he'd taken comfort in telling himself that he appeared to be parenting correctly, taking as evidence for it the success of his children, especially his son. When he could make it home, he was content to be able to see that his daughter was a well-adjusted young girl with a thriving social life, his son was excelling academically with promising career prospects, and that his family was happy.

When he sat down to dinner with them and watched his family chatting peacefully, he could allow himself to think that this is what he did it all for, being able to protect this peaceful life for his family. Was it all an illusion, something he'd allowed himself to believe to comfort himself? Was he just a fool all this time? He was starting to feel like one. He'd always, *always* taken Light's success in academics as proof that he'd raised his son right and that his son is happy. He couldn't be a bad parent if he produced such an exceptional son. So then, he must be doing something right.

That was what Soichiro had been telling himself and maybe he had done some things right in raising Light. Maybe he wasn't a complete failure.

Maybe Light was just so exceptional that he was able to shine despite Soichiro's neglect. Throughout his son's conversation with Matsuda, Soichiro wanted to stop listening, but forced himself to continue. Every word was like a stab through his chest, but he listened to it all, feeling more and more with each minute that he owed it to his son.

By the time they were done talking and L had gone to pick Matsuda up, Soichiro had taken to sitting, slumped forward on the couch. His men had tried to comfort him at first, but he declined to respond to them, staying with his head resting in his hands. He couldn't accept their comfort. How could he? This was all his own doing. He had ignored it for so long and now it was being shoved in his face.

He'd never meant…to be such a bad father. That was never how he'd imagined himself when he had kids. He only wanted…he only wanted to do right by his family and he thought he was doing that, but he didn't know what that was anymore.

There was also the problem of his son's…crush…on L, which was concerning to him for a lot of reasons, as well. Ignoring the mildly uncomfortable revelation that his son was gay for the moment, the object he had chosen for that affection was also troubling. It wasn't that he didn't respect L's formidable reputation or his dedication to justice, but his son deserved better than the pale, unsociable recluse.

His bright, intelligent, caring son deserved only the best and while L deserved Soichiro's respect, he did not deserve his son. Besides, though Soichiro didn't know L's exact age, the man had to be near his mid-twenties, too old for Light who deserved someone nearer his own age. And with L suspecting Light of being Kira, of all things, a relationship between the two of them would just be…

He was barely aware of L and Matsuda returning as he sat in quiet contemplation. Matsuda was immediately at his side, looking at him in concern. "Sir, are you feeling alright? Do you need a break?"

Now that he'd had some time to think, he managed to acknowledge his subordinate by giving him a strained smile. "It's okay, I'll be alright. I just have a lot to think about now."

Matsuda continued looking at him in obvious concern, his ability to keep his thoughts off his face as nonexistent as ever, but he clearly didn't know what to say. Soichiro didn't blame him, he wasn't sure what to do either.

"I must agree with Mr. Matsuda on that front." L huffed, walking over and retaking his seat from earlier. "You shouldn't push yourself too hard before you've fully recovered. You won't be much help to the investigation like this."

"Is that all you care about?!" Aizawa popped up, at L's throat once again.

L replied, unperturbed. "It is the most important thing. It is of paramount importance that we catch Kira and everything we do must be with that goal in mind."

"He's right." Soichiro cut in before a fight could start. "We're all here because we were willing to put our lives on the line to catch Kira." Aizawa visibly calmed a little at his chief's words and so Soichiro directed his attention to L. "I'll be sure not to tax myself any further. I'll return to the hospital soon and take a rest. Thank you, Ryuzaki."

"Any time. I'm merely looking after the investigation." L mumbled, distractedly. He started fumbling with his monitor setup. "I know you all got to listen to Matsuda's conversation in real time, but I haven't gotten the chance."

Which meant he better head back to the hospital soon if he didn't want to listen to that conversation a second time. If he was being honest with himself, he really wasn't up for that right now.

"Things with Light are going to be okay." Matsuda said, finding his voice.

"I don't know what the right thing to do is." Soichiro said heavily, being painfully honest with his subordinate.

"You could talk to Light." Matsuda suggested, giving a hopeful smile to his chief. "Making decisions on your own was one of the problems Light mentioned. So I think you two should decide how to move forward together. Light's smart and he's mature, he'll understand if you talk to him."

Soichiro let out a breath as he considered those words. "You're right. That would probably be the best option, but I don't look forward to telling Light that I let him be taped without his knowledge."

Matsuda winced in sympathy. "Just talk to him, Chief. It sounds like you both have a lot to say to each other."

You couldn't be more right, Soichiro's lips twisted into a small smile. He really should talk to his son. "I think I'll take your advice. I'm not sure how open I'll be able to be, but at the very least, I can tell Light I'm sorry."

Matsuda rested a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Don't be too hard on yourself, Chief. I know this can all be fixed."

I hope it can be, Soichiro thought to himself, gazing out the window.

He had to talk to Light.

~ ❶ ~

"Doesn't want to be a detective, huh?" L thought, sitting quietly.

Soichiro Yagami was long gone and L had listened to Light's conversation with Matsuda several times since then and he was struggling to fit what he'd heard into what he knew of Light. Light was a boy at the top of his social circle and happy to be there. He idolized his father and wanted to join law enforcement. He was cool and detached from those around him, except for his peculiar interest in L himself.

That is what L had thought of Light, but the conversation he'd been listening to had called all of it into question. Apparently Light didn't want to be like his father, didn't want to be in law enforcement, and wasn't as content at the top of his pecking order as he appeared.

The unfortunate thing was that L's instincts were telling him that Light was being truthful, something L didn't want to believe and so L was struggling to pin down what Light's true desires and intentions were. Were his predictions of Light's character the truth or was what Light said to Matsuda the truth? Or was it some combination of the two? Light was being as irritatingly baffling as always, nearly impossible to pin down, just like Kira. Speaking of…

Kira has shown the strong ability to know things that he shouldn't know, L thought quietly to himself. *How much he knows is arguable and it can't be determined yet how much of his knowledge is due to informants and how much is due to his apparent supernatural ability. Regardless, if he can*

kill people without being present, it doesn't seem unreasonable that would be able to access information without the use of cohorts.

There are quite a few things I can reasonably say that Kira doesn't know. Still. L cocked his head. *If Light is Kira, could he have figured out that Matsuda was wearing a wire? It's possible…but how would I go about proving it when I'm not even sure of it myself?*

Because as much as he wanted to believe Light was being disingenuous, he found his instincts told him something different. L had always been inclined to listen to his instincts. *If these are indeed Light's true feelings on the subject, could this have been the origin of Kira? It wouldn't explain Kira's abilities, but it would explain how they came about their twisted sense of justice and their hatred of criminals.* L pondered. *And there does seem to be an undercurrent of respect towards officers in Kira's behavior that Light upholds. If anything, this only strengthens the connection between them.*

Well, he was able to find out why Light didn't want to join the investigation, but he also had more questions now. L came away from his reflections with one concrete thought: he wouldn't get any further in this investigation until he confronted Light directly once more. It seemed the investigation was routinely coming to a standstill until he could see Light again, making it all the more apparent that Light was the key to all of this.

If he wanted to make sense of the case, he had questions for the chief's son. Additionally, it was imperative that he convince Light to join the investigation so that he could keep him close and keep an eye on him. There was a 95% chance that Light was Kira and even just a 5% chance would warrant keeping a close eye on him. Light was almost certainly Kira and couldn't be allowed to run around all day with them having no idea what he's doing.

Now that the FBI have basically finished their investigation, finding nothing, he could already feel the pressure from the other

investigators to remove the surveillance cameras in the Yagami household. With nothing to show for either of his efforts to prove Light Yagami suspicious to people outside of himself, L knew this was yet another battle he was losing against Kira.

It was more important now than ever that he find another way to keep an eye on Light now that he might soon be pressured into dropping his last method of watching Light. He had to replace it with something before Light was once again completely free to do whatever he wanted in secrecy. It would be especially helpful if he could continue to dress up his offer to have Light join the case as wanting Light's help, seeing how the others were beginning to make it known just how little they appreciated L's ongoing "harassment" of Light.

There was so much he had to consider and Light was so confusing that he couldn't begin to decipher his words and actions.

L detested not knowing something.

He had to talk to Light.

Chapter End Notes

> Join me in a prayer circle that it doesn't take me this long to pull together an update again 🕯

Recognition

Chapter Summary

Soichiro and L each get to talk to Light, but only one is satisfied with the outcome.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone who celebrates it had a nice Thanksgiving!

Light was confused when he got out of class and saw a missed message from his father. He didn't know when the last time his father called his phone was. Worried, Light quickly pulled up the voicemail and listened to it, fearing something else had happened to his dad.

His shoulders relaxed as he heard his father's voice in the recording, sounding a little stressed but alright, asking him to come by the hospital when he got the chance. He said that there was something they needed to talk about. Light stared at his phone after the message ended, his personal Shinigami best friend floating behind him.

That's weird, Light thought quietly as he stared at it. It didn't sound like his father was mad, but he couldn't tell exactly from his voice. It was abnormal that his father had called him for a non-emergency and it was odd that he asked Light to stop by. This definitely didn't happen the last time, too. Shaking things up was entirely the intention though, so he wasn't going to lose sleep over it.

Light shrugged it off, shoving his phone into his pocket and heading across campus. His classes were over for the day anyway, so he might as well go straight over and see what his dad wanted. Light instinctively wanted to hang back at school to see L, but he pushed the urge away. Similar to the previous timeline, L's attendance at school was hit-or-miss. He obviously only showed up for classes when he felt like it. It wasn't like he was actually interested in the college or in a degree in the first place. Apparently, today was one of those days that he couldn't be bothered.

On the bright side, Light took no small amount of pride in knowing that the only reason L enrolled at all was because of his interest in *him* . At any rate, Light would endeavor to wait until L showed up again. He could wait, even if he didn't want to.

Unlike his school, the hospital was much further from the house, so Light took the train there, making it impractical to walk. Taking the train made the trip quick though and before long, he was standing in front of the large building.

"You going in?" Ryuk asked, curiously.

"Yeah. Yeah, I am. I'm just…thinking." Light muttered under his breath, taking care that no one heard him talking to himself from a distance.

"About what your old man wants?" The Shinigami prodded.

"Yeah…I wonder what it is." Light replied. "I'm not *worried,* it's just…" Light drew off, not sure what to say actually, now that he was trying to put it into words. "Let's go." He said instead and took up a brisk pace towards the entrance. Ryuk didn't say anything, but the sound of flapping wings let him know that Ryuk was following him, as if he needed the reassurance. Ryuk was always right behind him.

The hospital staff were pleasant enough and even more so after he flashed his charming smile in every direction. He was able to get up to his father's room in record time. After standing out in the hallway the same way he had stood outside the hospital, he only allowed himself the slightest of pauses in front of the room before he grabbed the handle and went in.

Light really wasn't sure what he was expecting, but apparently there had been an expectation. The room was quiet, clean, peaceful and, most importantly, empty. There was only his father laid out in his hospital bed, an IV next to him but not connected to his arm. The starkness of the room made his father look pale, but his pallor was a lot better than it had been when he had first been admitted.

Mindful of the tranquility of the space, Light gently closed the door behind him so that there was only the quietest of clicks. His father was awake and although he'd appeared to be staring off into space when Light came in, he turned to smile tightly at him when the door closed.

"Light," Soichiro greeted. "It's good to see you, thank you for coming. You're here earlier than I expected."

"I came over right after school." Light explained. "Classes are over for the day."

His father's smile did something weird where it became more genuine at his words at the same time that it became more strained. That was puzzling. "You didn't need to do that. You should've gone home, changed clothes and rested before coming all the way here. I'm sure you're tired after a full day."

"It's alright, I'm fine." Light waved off without a thought, giving his father a smile and pacing further into the room. If anything, his father's expression fell even further at his words and it left Light confused. What was he saying wrong?

"It's okay for you to not be so timely sometimes." Soichiro said quietly.

Light blinked, dumbfounded. *I don't think I have ever heard him say that sentence.* Part of being the perfect son was not only being on time but being early. He did everything he was expected to as early as he possibly could and it was never brought up as an issue before.

Seeing that he didn't respond, his dad spoke up again. "But I'm glad you're here, there's something I've been meaning to talk to you about."

"Right." Light put on a smile, getting his footing back. "What about? I'm here to listen to whatever you need."

"Light." Soichiro's expression softened as he looked at him. He wasn't quite looking at Light like he was seeing him for the first time, but perhaps something close in nature to it. "I've had a realization recently."

"A realization?" Light prodded, pulling up a chair and sitting in his usual spot beside the bed. Ryuk swirled in the air behind him.

Soichiro spent a long moment in silence, looking as if he were trying to force himself to say something. "I'm sorry I couldn't see you very much when you were visiting the department." His expression said that that wasn't what he wanted to say.

Light chose not to call attention to it. "It's no problem. I know you're busy, I didn't expect you to be able to see me every time."

"Less than half." Soichiro gritted out, fisting his sheets. "I saw you less than half of the times you came by."

"I…" Light didn't know what to say to the attitude his father was displaying.

Soichiro held up a hand to stop Light from talking. "I've failed you, my son." It looked like it took every ounce of power he had to force the words out, regretting every syllable.

Wha– Light's brain screeched to a halt. He didn't understand what was going on here. What happened?

"I should tell you, Light. Weeks ago, L placed video cameras and listening devices in our home in order to watch everything that happened." Soichiro stared down at his bed sheets as he admitted this, shame all over his face. "I'm so sorry. I know it's an unforgivable invasion of your privacy, as well as Sayu and your mother's. L wanted to investigate the families of some of the investigators, including myself, and insisted it was vitally important to the case. I'm not sure if it means anything, but none of us meant any harm by it, we only wanted to do what it took to clear you."

Light stared at his father with wide eyes. The man looked like the weight of the world was pressing down on his shoulders. For his part, Light was shocked that his dad was admitting to what they did. This… wasn't how he thought it would go.

In the past, they hadn't told him about the surveillance until he'd agreed to join the investigation and started. Understandably, it was for security reasons. Plus, he was sure L told him partly because he wanted to see Light's reaction to the information. Any normal person would be outraged, uncomfortable, *upset* at hearing that, even if they understood why it was done. Kira, and Light, were calm and accepting. Unsurprised.

Light thought that it would go the same way or, if not, L would still be

the one to bring it up and that he would do it to try and study Light. This wasn't that. Actually….

Light glanced at Ryuk out of the corner of his eye and met the Shinigami's eyes. Ryuk looked at him in confusion for a second before jolting into realization. "Oh, right! Cameras! Got it!" He flew up and started scrambling across all the surfaces of the room, unseen by anyone besides Light.

"You…allowed cameras to be set up in the house?" Light replied, hesitantly. "You…allowed us to be watched?"

If possible, Soichiro shrunk further in on himself. "I believed it was the only way. I just wanted him to stop insinuating our family members could be Kira, but it led to him forming an obsession with you. I sacrificed your privacy for the investigation and it only made things worse in the end."

"And it seems," Soichiro gave a sad, regretful smile. "This isn't the first time I've put an investigation ahead of you, is it?"

"Dad?" Light said, shocked. What was he *saying?*

"No cameras or listening devices!" Ryuk called out from a wall corner.

So this isn't part of L's schemes? Light thought.

"Now that I think about it…in a way, I think I'm grateful for the surveillance. I learned more about your life than I ever have and I'm not happy about what I've learned." Soichiro sighed.

“Like?” Light furrowed his brows, wondering if he was talking about Light’s constant exclamations of love for L and if so, how that translated into the conversation they were having.

“Light…you don’t want to be an officer, do you?” Soichiro asked, heavily.

“Uh, what?” Ryuk said, head swiveling around to look at the man.

“Dad?” Light jolted. How did he know that? Did Touta tell him? Did Touta tell L? He had really thought Touta would’ve kept the secret, but he couldn’t find it in himself to be angry at the man if he did tell them. Touta was almost incapable of malice, so it was undoubtedly done with the best of intentions. As for his dad’s question, he wasn’t sure how to answer.

“Now would be the best time to be honest with me, Light.” His dad prodded, practically reading his mind for possibly the first time.

Light hesitated in answering, but he had nothing if not guts. “I didn’t know how to tell you.” He admitted, tentatively.

Soichiro let out a breath Light hadn’t noticed he was holding. “I can see why. If you’re worried about…I’m not disappointed in you, Light.” He still wasn’t looking at him and Light found himself staring down at his hands in his lap, not sure why it was becoming painful to look at his dad.

“Are you sure you’re not? You always wanted everything perfect, always wanted me to follow in your footsteps. You always wanted me to be a proper man and take care of the family and make the country

better and safer and…" Light didn't know why he started talking and he was only half-aware of what he was saying anymore, but he couldn't stop. Why couldn't he stop?

The words just kept pouring out and it seemed the breaks had gotten ripped out of his system. "You haven't mentioned L yet, but I know you must have heard that and do you have nothing to say about it? You have to have something to say. How can you tell me you're not ashamed of me when you won't look at me and you know that I don't want to be anything like the son you wanted–"

"Light." Soichiro said loudly, cutting Light's tirade off and shocking him out of his muttering stupor. Later, Light would be grateful to have had the sense knocked back into him. In the moment, Light just jerked out of it and hurriedly looked back up at his father who was finally looking at him.

Soichiro had that steely look in his eyes that Light was used to seeing, face set in stone. The brief thought flashed through Light's mind that his dad was angry at him but just a second later, Soichiro reached forward and clasped his hand onto Light's shoulder. "Light." His dad said his name again, quieter this time but just as sternly. "I don't want to hear you talking like that. The only son I've ever wanted was you. You are *my son,* you have always been enough for me."

Light's mouth felt dry as he looked his dad in the eyes, searching for truth. In them, he saw the same steely determination he had seen so often during hard moments in the Kira investigation. The sight of it made something in Light settle and he began to feel just a little bit more like himself again. And even deeper inside himself, he felt something else be soothed.

"Dad…do you…" Light swallowed. "Do you really mean that?"

For a moment, Light felt like he was in a memory he had from his childhood. He was six years old and leaning up into his father's lap as he sat in a chair. His dad was telling him that one day Light could be a detective like he was. Young Light looked up excitedly at his dad, all childish excitement and asked if he could really do it, happy but needing the reassurance from his father like he needed the air.

For a moment, Light felt the same as he had in that moment. Excited but desperately needing the reassurance.

"I mean it, Light." His dad smiled, tiredly. "I'm sorry I pushed you so hard that you didn't know that. I want to tell you now, since I failed to do it before. I only pushed you because you're my son and I wanted the best for you. You and your sister both. I just…had ideas about what would be the best for you two and I never truly asked you what that was."

Dad… Light stared at his father silently as the man unloaded some built-up emotions of his own.

"I never realized how bad things had gotten and that's my fault. I buried my head in the ground but no longer. I promise things will be better!" Soichiro insisted, heatedly. "I can't promise that I'm completely comfortable with everything I've learned, but that doesn't mean I'm ashamed of you. If you're pursuing happiness, then you're doing the right thing."

Light felt elation welling up nearly out of control inside him but suppressed it cautiously. "Are you saying that about *everything?* " His dad caught his meaning.

“I have to say that I never expected anything like that and I’m not overly happy about it…but I’m not trying to say it’s a bad thing either, I…” Soichiro sighed and scrubbed his face with his hands. “I’m sorry, I

know I’m not dealing with this the best way I could be. If I was a better man, I could easily handle all of this and be able to use all the right words. I don’t want it to seem like I’m upset that you aren’t interested in women. I’m not angry at you for for being different than I expected, I’m angry at myself for expecting you to be different.”

Something like excitement began swelling even higher in Light’s chest at what his father was saying. He was starting to allow himself to believe that things could work out between them. He looked with hopeful eyes at his dad and Soichiro seemed to straighten up even higher at the sight of it. Bolstered by it.

"I’m not sorry this happened. I think…no, I'm sure that what I'm really sorry about is letting go of that image of ideal family life that I had for you. For as long as I've thought about it, I imagined you settling down with a nice girl and buying a home like ours and having kids and having a similar job to the one I have now. In retrospect, I imagined your life choices being the exact same as my own." His dad huffed under his breath, a wryly amused sound.

His dad spent a moment in silence before continuing. "I'm not upset that you're gay. I'm just sorry to let go of the dream I had for your future." A small smile spread across his face now. "It wasn't the knowledge of your leanings that has been tormenting me lately. That fell to the side in the face of how much I had failed you. When I realized that, I realized something else. All I need from you is for you to do whatever makes you happy. If you're chasing what you want, then I'll find a way to make peace with whatever you decide to do, no matter what it is."

And he really seemed to mean it, too, Light realized. The look in his dad's eyes seemed a little strained, likely a combination of the stress of the day's revelations and his admitted difficulty with letting go of everything he'd expected of his golden child. It was probably difficult for him to talk about all this, to make these promises aloud, even though he meant them. But he was doing it anyway, despite how awkward and uncomfortable it was making him.

Light felt that warm feeling pool in his stomach, the kind that made him feel like the sun was coming out from behind dark clouds and bathing him in its warmth. He…didn't know how long it has been since he'd felt so *loved* . For the first time in a long time, he could honestly say his father truly loves him. He hadn't realized how good it would feel to think it.

Wordlessly, Light stood up from his chair and moved to his father's bedside, bangs blocking his eyes from view.

"Light?" His father looked at him in surprise but Light didn't pay any mind. In the next instant, he lurched forward and gave his father a big hug, wrapping both arms entirely around him and squeezing.

"Light…" His dad whispered, body relaxing. Light felt rather than saw his dad return the embrace, wrapping his arms around Light to hold his son to him tightly.

"Believe me…" His dad continued just as quietly, sounding as if he were on the verge of tears. "I am *so* sorry. I can't promise I'll be the perfect father to you going forward. But I'll do everything I can to try to be the parent you deserve, so please let me try."

~ ❶ ~

Light wanted to vibrate with excitement when L showed up to their classes the next day, something that his ever present friend Ryuk readily teased him about. Light dutifully ignored the well-intentioned ribbing.

Light hadn’t been surprised to learn that L shared all of his classes.

What would be the point of going spying at Light's college if he didn't sit in on his classes? It only made sense, but Light still found it funny that the best detective in the world came here willing to get classes on how to be a detective. He probably would've been bored out of his mind! Luckily for him he didn't have to, since that wasn't the degree that Light was pursuing.

Instead of leaving after their first class had ended, Light stayed in his seat to see if L would approach him. Several people that he barely knew stopped by his desk to talk to him and so he put on his mask, chatting happily with them. Out of the corner of his eye, Light caught sight of L standing hunched at the back of the group, waiting for his turn with Light. It only made him want his peers to leave ever more, so he could spend time with L.

Eventually they moved on and that was when L pounced, much to Light's delight. "Hello, Light." L greeted, sounding nearly as unbothered as he usually did. "How's it going?"

"Better now that you're here." Light easily replied with his own greeting. He was only telling the truth, but he mostly just said it to screw with him.

L slid into a stunned silence, blinking in confusion. "...why is that?"

Light wanted to roll his eyes. Of all the things to respond with. "You really don't know why? I like you, Hideki." Light asserted.

Another pause. "You're still calling me that."

And you're still avoiding the issue, Light replied in his mind. Out loud, he said, "I can't call you by your real name and it's what I first got to know you as. Besides, what would happen if someone here heard me

calling you by a name besides the one you enrolled under?" Light reasoned, teasingly.

He could see the resulting calculations going through L's mind. He knew the other man was thinking how very Kira-like Light's thoughts were or something in that vein. Light's lips tugged further into a smile.

"I suppose you're correct." L said, clearly trying his best to sound nonchalant, as if he weren't psychoanalyzing everything Light said. "If you like me so much, then why are you refusing to join the investigation?" He asked, switching topics.

Light responded by getting up from his desk and slinging his backpack over his shoulder. "We have our next class soon, so we don't want to be late. How about we talk about this on our way there and after that, we can catch a quick lunch together before the next one?" He gave L a kind smile over his shoulder.

"You realize I'm only here for you, right? I don't particularly care about missing my classes, they won't expel me." L commented.

"Oh, he's being awfully forward today, isn't he?" Ryuk joked, knowing Light couldn't respond.

"Oh, I know you don't care." Light gave a happy laugh. "But I do."

L peered closely at him for a moment, then began following him to the door and into the hallway. "That sounds like a good idea, then. But Light, I need an answer." He prodded.

"Yes, you do." Light acknowledged breezily. And he could understand

why L was wondering about that. A normal person would be tripping over themself to get to spend time with their crush, especially if it was helping them with an important project and truthfully, Light did want to be part of the investigation, if only because of the fact that he could spend time with L and the others he'd started to get close to.

In fact, although he'd decided to make L work to get him on the team, he was starting to get antsy about it. It was taking too long! He wanted to spend hours a day every day with L again. At least L wasn't giving up, as usual, but Light might just help it along now on the sly. "To be completely honest, I don't hate the idea of working on the case." He said with an air of reluctance.

"Because you don't wish to be a detective anymore." L concluded, directly.

You're a very bold man, you know. Light thought in amusement. Externally, he stopped walking and gave L *the look* . "How did you know that?" In part, this was a farce, but in another, he had been wondering this since he had his conversation with his father.

One thing he hadn't bought was that he'd revealed that information on camera at home, so where did the both of them pick it up from? He could easily accept the idea that L simply got the idea from observing Light, but his father just wasn't that level of observant.

L studied him as he answered. "I have an admission to make. I'm afraid I was listening to your conversation with Mr. Matsuda at that cafe." L didn't sound even slightly sorry. And wasn't that a surprise! Not L's lack of remorse over boundary- crossing and law breaking, of course, but the fact that he was being recorded at that time.

He could've slapped himself. That was the absolute last time he left Ryuk at home! He was lucky it wasn't any big deal for him whether

they were listening or not, he didn't feel hurt or violated by it at all. Honestly, if that kind of thing bothered him on an emotional level, he probably wouldn't have fallen for L in the first place, given the older man's habits. He would've been too hurt by them. He knew L well enough to accept any and all violations of privacy and personal space before even starting all of this for the second time.

He could actually stand to violate that last one a little more, Light thought crossly. He really wished L would get to be more interested in invading his personal space than he was in invading his conversations.

The only thing that had ever bothered him about it was what he might be caught doing or saying, and he didn't say anything to Touta that he didn't think would be known eventually. He was also lucky that he didn't mind that particular information being known earlier than he'd planned, it didn't really mess with him going forward.

"You don't sound like you feel bad at all for doing it." Light said, but quickly followed it up without waiting. "Why did you do it?"

"Because I am very invested in getting you to join the investigation." L said in a tone that explained almost everything. "You see, this is quite possibly the most challenging case I've ever faced and I've long ago admitted that I'll need some assistance in apprehending Kira."

It must really annoy you to keep admitting, even if indirectly, that you're outmatched. Light thought.

That was the essence of about half of what L said, the other half being ostensibly complimenting him. They were mostly just indirect compliments though, mostly relying on the underlying implication that Light was intelligent and talented and whatever else, so it could barely be called complimenting. Plus, Light knew too much about this

man to take it as genuine and be flattered at it like someone else might. He was sure L only said it to stroke his ego so that Light would slip up.

He might be wrong, but he'd always secretly suspected that L almost never thought very highly of anyone.

"I'm not sure why you want someone who confessed to being a Kira supporter to work with you so badly." Light cocked his head, painting his face with confusion.

L narrowed his eyes at him, but what emotion in particular was behind it, Light couldn't say. "That admission was indeed rather shocking, Light. I can honestly say I never suspected it."

No, you suspected me of much worse, Light thought, wryly.

"However," L continued. "You underestimate how much I want you to join us. I am prepared to go to extreme lengths to convince you."

Light didn't know if L was just unaware of the implications of what he'd just said or if L he was trying to be threatening. Either way, instead of being intimidated, Light felt a jolt of excitement go up his spine at the intense words. Even more intense and exciting if he were to take it out of context…

"I've thought it over and I don't believe you being a supporter of Kira will pose a significant problem for the investigation." L continued, unaware of where Light's mind was going. "In fact, I believe your….views….will bring a much-needed new perspective to the case."

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Light raised his eyebrows incredulously at what he’d just heard.

“I assure you, I am entirely serious about this.” L stated, calmly. “And what if I don’t want to join the investigation because I don’t want to help you catch Kira?”

“If that had been a point of contention for you, then you likely would have mentioned it earlier. Surely it would’ve come up one of the many times you were objecting to joining and supplying your reasoning for it. This leads me to conclude that it isn’t a problem for you.” L explained.

That’s right! Light realized. *For a Kira supporter, I didn’t really lean heavily on loyalty to Kira for my reasoning.* Light put on a smile. “Kira isn’t so weak that the addition of a mere college student would take them down. I’m not worried about it.”

“You aren’t, huh.” L muttered under his breath. A second passed and then he raised his voice a little. “Your faith in Kira is touching.” L deadpanned. “But you shouldn’t sell yourself short. I am certain your intelligence and insight would be of tremendous help.”

“Can we get back on the previous topic? Your surveillance?” Light prodded, unwilling to let L push further back into his relationship with Kira.

“Right. Your relationship with your father.” Light didn’t think he was imagining the smug note in L’s voice, teasing him about their relationship. “I’m given to understand that your main reasons for your refusal are that you do not want to be a detective - as your father wishes - and that you have a strained relationship with the police chief. Is that correct?”

Well, it's more disinterest than anything else. Light answered honestly, even if only in his own mind. He'd done that whole song and dance before; joining the investigation that was searching for him under the pretense of helping the investigation only to learn L's real name and all that jazz. He and L had been the only ones to recognize the farce for what it was and they used the opportunity to investigate each other.

He still did want to be part of the investigation, boredom aside, but that was because it would get him closer to L. None of this, he could say, though…well, maybe he could say that last part. "That's right." Light agreed, instead. "Part of me feels like if I take part in the Kira investigation, I might get sucked further into that kind of life and become entrenched in a career I never really wanted. Dad especially would have *expectations* afterwards and I want to avoid that. Or I did, anyway."

Light's indications that something had changed with him was entirely intentional. He wanted to nudge L closer to "convincing" him to join the team without being too eager. Not that it would make L any less suspicious.

"Did something happen?" L cocked his head.

Light made a show of shifting his body nervously. "Well, me and my dad talked."

"May I ask what about?" L asked, eyes following Light's every move.

"Dad told me about how you guys set up cameras in our house to watch me." L's lack of a response confirmed for Light that his dad had gotten permission from L to spill the piece of information. He really hadn't thought that his father would go rogue like that, to be honest.

“He said that he realized from watching me how much pressure he’d been putting on me to conform to his views…and how sorry he was.”

Light smiled softly against his will. “We talked it out, maybe for the first time ever.”

“I see.” L nodded. “That must have been a relief. And did it happen to change any of your feelings about the investigation?”

“My feelings about the investigation…” Light hummed, closing his eyes and pretending to think. “I suppose I don’t feel so worried about working with my dad anymore.”

“Hm.” L mumbled, looking at him. “Would you consider joining if I could promise my assistance with something when the investigation is completed?” Light got the impression that L had come to college that day prepared with this offer, rather than producing it on the spur of the moment.

“Is that a blanket offer to help me with *anything* or do you have something specific in mind?” Light asked, genuinely curious.

“If you join the investigation and help us catch Kira, I am prepared to pull some strings to get you whatever internship or job you want once you graduate.” L stated, steadily.

That was unexpected, Light thought. “You’ll help me get any job I want?”

L nodded. “Whatever it might be, I am confident that I have connections to get you hired, even if it is a high government position. We have covered that I am aware that you don’t want to be a

detective. To be honest, that makes more sense to me, as the degree you are pursuing would be confusing if matched to someone who aspired to be a detective."

"So you slithered into my school record, too." Light said, a statement of fact, with a smile on his face.

L's eye twitched. "You continue to be completely unbothered by your privacy being violated. Is that because I am a detective or because I am 'Hideki'?"

I'm surprised you would bring it up so directly, given how perplexing you find my feelings for you, Light thought with both surprise and some good humor. L was basically asking if Light didn't mind his intrusions because he was a respected detective or because Light loved him.

"More the second than the first." Light answered completely honestly. "Hideki is very important to me."

"I see." L muttered.

Do you? Light wasn't sure he did. But he *would* .

"Well, you're right about the degree. It doesn't tell you very much about what I plan to do, but it does provide some ideas about what I don't want to do. But what makes you think I need your help? I'm the top student in Japan going to the top school in Japan. I'm talented and well-liked and have connections in law enforcement. What makes you think I couldn't make plans to get any job I wanted with my own efforts?" Light didn't speak with any emotion other than curiosity. He mostly just wanted to see what L's response would be.

“You’re right that you could probably get whatever you wanted eventually. You’re a very intelligent and determined person, Light.” L made that sound like a partial insult. “However, your achievements may not be felt as strongly outside of Japan so if you plan to look elsewhere immediately, you may find yourself having to work for years in Japan before you can get transferable experience.”

He cocked his head to the side as he looked at Light. “Additionally, my assistance will make the process far easier than if you were to do it on your own straight out of college and your efforts could be better spent elsewhere instead. Years of relevant experience is required for most job positions on the level that you deserve. You could be placed in a higher level immediately instead of having to prove yourself by working up from the bottom.

You’re right that you are already an impressive young man that can make his own way. What I’m offering is the support to quickly and easily be able to go anywhere and do anything. I gathered from our conversations that that would be something that appeals to you.”

Ryuk's head swung back and forth as he watch the back-and-forth between Light and L.

"You’re not wrong," Light allowed himself to be swayed by the words, just a little. He always felt so happy when L showed that he knew him and paid attention to what he wanted, more so than anyone had ever bothered to before. Plus, a large part of him couldn’t help but imagine a future where he leaves Japan and starts a life with L.

"I suppose there's just one thing to say, then." Light said, more than ready to spend his days with L again. "When do we start?"

"You can start this weekend if you're amenable." L assured.

"Whoa, he's moving quickly! If I didn't know any better, I'd think he was just as desperate as you are." Ryuk cackled.

"Sounds good to me, but before we start…how do I know you're going to keep your promise about helping me with my career after the case is over?" Because Light couldn't resist teasing him a little.

"Do you not trust me?" L responded, almost playfully.

"I think you're a liar at the best of times." Light shot back, absolutely no hesitation.

The corner of L's lips tilted up into a hint of a smile and he pressed a thumb to his lips, almost in an effort to hide that fact. "I assure you that it will be no trouble for me to keep my word. It likely won't take more than a single phone call. That is," L's tone was a mixture of a hint of amusement and something else. "Assuming you don't turn out to be Kira yourself."

"You mean, assuming you can prove either conclusion." Light met the direct challenge with one of his own.

L's eyes narrowed in response and the two were caught staring straight into each other's eyes. Suddenly, Light's eyes glanced downwards as he noticed L's feet shifting. The movements seemed strange in nature and it took Light a few seconds to see why. It was discomfort. And if Light wasn't wrong, it also looked like he was trying to scratch his foot with his other one through the shoes.

L has always had that weird behavior with shoes, hasn't he? Light pondered, not noticing when L noticed his staring and followed his

eyes to his feet. *No, not the shoes, I don't think.*

“Uh, Light? What’s up?” L’s question went unanswered.

Light remembered what he read about people who had sensory issues and the extreme discomfort with socks rang a bell. He hadn’t paid much attention to it in his past life besides noting with disapproval how strange it was that L often wore shoes without socks. This was one of the times when he was wearing them and “it looks uncomfortable…”

“May I ask what does?” L’s voice finally permeated Light’s thoughts.

Light jerked. “Did I say that out loud?”

“Yes, you did.” L stared speculatively at him. “What looks uncomfortable?” He pressed.

“Your socks. You look uncomfortable in them, like you want to take them off right now.” Light contemplated. “Why are you wearing them if you hate them so much?”

“…” L doesn’t answer for a moment, looking like he was both surprised and like he was calculating. Light remained impassively waiting for him and it paid off. “I don’t know how you’ve determined that, but be assured, I can handle it.”

Light didn’t like the implication there. “Maybe this is me overstepping,” When had he ever not done that? “But you shouldn’t have to. I don’t know why you’re wearing them, but it’s not worth making yourself uncomfortable for. I won’t think less of you for it, I promise.’

L made no answer.

A few seconds later, Light's watch beeped and jolted the two out of their staring contest. "Damn. We'll have to get back to this later." Despite saying that, Light smiled as he turned on his heel and started back down the hallway.

"Why is that?" L inquired, not quite moving to follow him yet.

Light looked back over his shoulder, not pausing in his stride and smile still in place. "Because now we're late."

~ ❶ ~

When Light showed up at the newest hotel with his father - finally checked out of the hospital - that weekend, he met with quite the reception. All of the investigators flocked to him, some being more loud than others.

"Light! I'm so glad you could make it!" Matsuda smiled widely as he said it, his face bright like a lightbulb.

The other man's excitement was outright contagious, Light wouldn't have been able to stop the smile that spread across his own face even if he wanted to.

"Good to see you, Light." A much more calm Aizawa stated, coming over to shake his hand. "I'm relieved to have you on the case with us."

"Hi, Light. How've you been?" Naomi asked him, less excitable than Touta but looking no less happy to see him.

Light smiled brightly at the group. "Hi, guys. Glad to be here! I've been fine, Noami, thank you. How are you and Raye?"

"We've both decided to stay in Japan until the Kira case is over." Naomi informed him with a smile. "We've found a more permanent place to say for the time being, we're renting out an apartment."

"I'm glad to hear that!" And Light really was. He'd grown fond of Naomi in the time since they'd met again. He was happy to know that they weren't going to leave just yet. "But can you do that? Doesn't Raye have to go back to the U.S. for his job?" He worked for the American FBI, after all…

“Luckily, Ryuzaki pulled some strings for us and got Raye more-or-less put on leave. He may be doing some work online and he might have to fly back once in a while, but we’re primarily stationed here now.” Naomi explained.

L helped, huh? Way to go, L! Light cheered in his mind. It was probably no big thing for him, but it still showed how much he wanted Naomi to help with the investigation that he interceded on her behalf.

Then again, Light acknowledged. *Maybe part of it was to have Raye close at hand, too. Raye was the agent tasked with stalking me, after all. And he was at the center of the whole kidnapping debacle. It would make sense if L wanted to have access to him at a moment’s notice if something came up.*
“I’m glad to know you’ll be sticking around.” He said to her.

“That’s right. It looks like we’ll be seeing a lot of each other.” Naomi grinned.

“So!” Light addressed the room. “What should I start with?”

LIght quickly found himself looking through footage of Kira. Or at least, the closest thing they had to footage of Kira. Naturally, it consisted of recordings of verified or suspected Kira killings. He’d already decided before going there that basically all of the tasks he’d be given would be tests from L. After all, if he knew anything about L, the man was already absolutely convinced that Kira was Light, to the exclusion of all others. Under that belief, giving Light any legitimate tasks to catch Kira would be counterproductive.

Light reminded himself of that as he noted down a few clips that weren’t part of his body count. He wasn’t sure if L knew those weren’t his and planted them there of it they were just mistakes L or someone else made. His love’s trickery was at the forefront of his mind, regardless.

L’s tricks were both ingenious and delusional in that, no matter which way you go, he’ll find reason to be suspicious. For example, if Light noted them down, then it indicated he had inside knowledge on Kira’s activities. If Light pretended they were all Kira’s killings though, then he was feigning ignorance in a way that flew contrary to Light’s already established intelligence and observational skills.

Even if the inserted videos were somehow unintentional, Light was sure that there was some underlying test to having him look over the videos. It was the perfect time, right after he officially joined, and the right activity. It looked creditable to the other investigators and it was a good opportunity to see how Kira-like Light’s thought process and insights really were. Light had considered not pointing out the mistaken footage, but that was boring. If L wanted Kira-level intuition, then that is what he would get.

Speak of the devil. L rolled up in his chair alongside Light without warning, but the brunette didn't flinch. "Hey, Hideki." Light greeted, not looking away from the screens.

"Light." L returned. "I don't suppose you've found something significant already?" The man asked, glancing at Light's notes.

"I have, actually." Light said, but didn't expand further.

"May I inquire as to what that is?" L asked when it became clear Light wasn't going to volunteer the information.

"I think some of these deaths weren't Kira." He stated, promptly.

"Oh?" L prompted, his tone unreadable.

"Mmhm." Light hummed in agreement. "Kira only kills criminals and all but one of the ones I find questionable weren't criminals. This last one was a criminal, but our info on him says that he was a heavy smoker and that he exhibited hypertension significantly before he died. It was probably just a heart attack."

"Interesting point." L allowed, glancing over at Light's notes. Light allowed him to read them in silence, relishing in their close proximity as L stayed leaned into his space. "And so you believe this to just be a health problem in the victim then."

"Well, you're the expert. You tell me." Light turned to face him. "Can Kira replicate longstanding underlying health problems in his

killings?" They both knew the answer to that one and the knowledge hung in the air.

"No." L answered, unnecessarily. "All of the most verified deaths related to Kira were sudden and many of the victims appeared to be completely healthy individuals."

"I'll just move these into the 'Not Kira' pile then." Light smirked. "Looks like Kira's killings aren't so untraceable, after all." He allowed.

"I suppose." L sounded doubtful. "Although according to the information provided to us by Ms. Misora, Kira can kill in ways other than a heart attack, perhaps even by controlling someone else to murder the person for them. If Kira wanted to kill someone in a way that was virtually untraceable, he could still do it."

Always have to have the last word, don't you, L? Good to know you're using that information, though. Light thought as he smiled. "Good point."

~ ❶ ~

L paused as he took in Light's easygoing form. His painless agreement to L's speculations was stumping because he had taken Kira to be someone who was too childish to acquiesce like that. Someone who would rise to any challenge. L kept waiting for that trait to show up in Light, but the boy never seemed to become *too* prideful.

L considered Light's assent that he could still kill someone and make it appear accidental. He decided to push a little more. "I do wonder if you're planning on doing that, Light."

Light's reaction was immediate. "No!" Light burst out, jolting forward. For a second, the thought flashed through L's mind that Light might actually attack him right here. The second passed and instead, L found both his hands being held in Light's own and Light's serious eyes staring steadily into his own. "I would never do anything to hurt you!"

L…didn't know how to respond to that. In truth, he couldn't even wrench his eyes away from Light's. The way he said that, as if he were making a vow, was so serious. L struggled to tell himself that Light was lying, playing a role, but…he couldn't. His anger at the suggestion was just too explosive.

Maybe it was also the firm grip on his hands as Light held them or the way Light stared directly into his eyes as he said it and continued to do so without averting his eyes…maybe it was his tone of voice, how panicked he sounded at the mention of L getting hurt. How determined Light sounded when he insisted L wasn't in danger with him.

He believed Light. Just like with his recorded conversation with Matsuda, L couldn't convince himself that Light wasn't being genuine and that confused and unnerved him. He very badly wished that Light was lying, because if Light was then he didn't have to deal with the implications of the truth in this circumstance.

He could accept a shallow affection from Light, one that was either entirely faked or otherwise something weak that could be easily extinguished when he got to know the real L. It was not the first time that L found himself thinking that perhaps Light felt something more than that, but this was the first time he couldn't dismiss it. Before he could reason himself out of such a conclusion, but no longer.

No, L thought heavily as he looked into intense golden eyes that held a tidal wave of emotion. *That's no longer the case.*

He trusted his instincts. He had *always* trusted his instincts, they had helped him with cases numerous times in the past. They were the same instincts that told him that Light was Kira. Light's momentary panic at the mere suggestion of hurting him and the intense look in his golden eyes now…it didn't look feigned. Light being that good of an actor didn't feel to L like as reasonable an assumption now.

Light was truly upset and L knew why, but it was still difficult to accept. Arguably, Light's entire affectionate side wasn't fitting for Kira. Did this mean that Light wasn't Kira? It didn't make sense for Kira to be upset about L getting hurt. Kira couldn't possibly be attracted to the Detective L. So could he have been..?

But no, that didn't feel right, either. Light was nearly perfect as Kira. L couldn't look at him without imagining him as the serial killer he was chasing. Light was definitely hiding something and if it wasn't supernatural powers and a stack of bodies, he would be surprised.

So what's going on here? L pondered. *I refuse to believe Light isn't Kira even if the behavior doesn't fit. And…I can no longer convince myself that his feelings are either just a schoolboy crush or part of some elaborate scheme.* "I'm sorry, Light. I didn't mean to upset you." L felt numb as he spoke.

L counted the seconds that passed and then Light visibly calmed. “I’m sorry, that was a bit of an overreaction, wasn’t it? I just really don’t like the idea of you getting hurt.”

L got that. He didn’t understand it in the slightest, but he got it.

L was willing to do anything, he determined, if he could identify the parameters of Light’s feelings for him. If he could just define this unknown variable. "Would you be willing to join the Kira case if I agreed to date you for the duration of the investigation?" L inquired,

his tone devoid of anything that would tell Light whether he was serious or not.

"I refuse." Light said point-blank, his expression turning serious in the blink of an eye.

"Excuse me?" L's eyes widened, slightly. That hadn't been expected at all. Shouldn't Light have jumped at the opportunity? Especially since L hadn't done anything to encourage his crush up until this point.

"I refuse to date you under those circumstances." Light reiterated, seriously.

"You mean…you don't wish to date during the investigation?" L checked, tilting his head.

Light shook his own head in disagreement, making him even more confused. "No, I don't care about dating during the investigation. What I care about is why you're doing it. I don't want to blackmail you into it and I don't want it to be a transaction. I want you to do it because you're starting to like me too…" Light drew off, but he'd said enough.

Was it possible to understand and not understand something at all at the same time? L hadn't thought so before now, but he was starting to reevaluate that. "I don't dislike you." L said.

…No, it was certainly not a matter of him not liking Light. Light was obviously a very likable young man, but more than that, L remembered how thoughtful Light had been earlier about his socks. Light, in that moment, had genuinely seemed to care about him, even if it was something mundane and that wasn't an unpleasant feeling. He couldn't say that anyone besides Watari had ever done something like that for him and even Watari didn't do it with the softness that

Light had.

On one side, L felt uncertain about the implication that Light had been observing him enough to know that he hated socks. It wasn't the first time he'd been investigated, but it *was* the first time he'd been investigated successfully. There were no insignificant details in L's line of work, so the successfulness of the endeavor wasn't lessened in the slightest by it only being about his footwear preferences.

On the other hand, it felt…pleasant?...to be thought about. Watari had been the only one that followed him, who understood his methods and habits. Most didn't seem to try to understand him. That Light was trying and that he took L's preferences into consideration…L treated the resulting feelings with caution.

Light was infuriatingly hard to place and refused to be categorized. Yet, he was quickly becoming the most formidable opponent L had ever faced. One that was strangely prone to defending him and treated him with unfailing kindness and understanding. It was all very confusing if it couldn't all be written off as an act, but nothing about it dictated that he didn't like Light.

"I'm glad you don't dislike me." Light smiled softly, before adding, "But that's not the same as returning my feelings. I don't want to be asked out like it's part of a contract."

"I understand. Then I won't make a suggestion like that again. I apologize." L said.

"Don't apologize." Light shook his head, all good humor now. "I know a little about you now. You'll chase anything down like a bloodhound when you smell even a trace of blood. I like how tenacious you are. And feel free to ask me out again when you start having a crush of your own!" Light gave a playful wink.

Light speaks as if he knows me intimately. He's correct, as well. L was indeed willing to do anything for a case. Not because of justice, but because he despised losing. Justice was and had always been an excuse. People generally cared an inordinate amount about it, but L wasn't sure if it existed in the form that they liked to believe it did.

From his experiences dealing with all sorts in the police force and beyond, L found that most individuals wanted to believe in a soft and fluffy kind of justice that made all wrongs right again, but L knew differently. Real justice was something hard and cold that left most people feeling hollow at the end. L had always cared for justice as little as he cared for people's petty feelings; they were of interest to him only as long as they were convenient or important for his job.

Light couldn't know all of that, but L still felt as if Light saw more of him than the others L had encountered. L already knew that Light was incredibly intelligent and also very observant. He had already determined during their first meeting that the other investigators were neither particularly intelligent nor particularly observant, so he wasn't disappointed with their performance so far.

"I appreciate that." L didn't mean that, but he did at least have some amount of social skills. Enough to guess at times what someone would want to hear and use it to manipulate them. Light was usually an exception, unfortunately. "And you are correct in your assumption. Rest assured, Light, I am willing to do *anything* to complete this case." He meant that to sound as threatening as it sounded. He knew that if there were a blemish on his record, he would obsess over it.

"You're an investigator, it's what you do. I know you probably got your reputation for never failing to crack a case because you'll do anything to get your criminal." Light said, shrugging.

Once again, Light's ability to read him was impressive…and worrying.

But aloud, he observed, “It seems your father has told you quite a bit about me.” That wasn’t necessarily the case, but L had already determined that *something* he had heard previously about L had peaked Light’s curiosity and eventually evoked his sentiment. Whatever it was happened before or shortly after the Kira killings started.

“Your reputation precedes you.” Light quipped, his lips snapping into a quick smirk. “There wasn’t much to tell, to be honest. You keep to yourself a lot and he didn’t talk about you after the killings started.”

L already knew that. Soichiro Yagami was a man of upstanding moral character and sound judgment, he would know what could and couldn’t be spoken of. Besides that, of the few family dinners the chief had gone to since the investigation had gotten well underway, he rather suspected half of them occurred under surveillance.

“But I look forward to learning even more about you during the investigation.” Light smiled softly, looking at L as if he were the entire world.

For the first time, L didn’t strictly take that as a threat from Kira. Now, he picked up on the visible - though still entirely baffling - affection underlying it.

Also for the first time, L wondered if he could really handle Light Yagami.

L

Chapter Notes

> Finals and sick family members and Christmas travel, oh my! I busted ass to get this upload up by Christmas but it's short anyway!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Quillsh Wammy thought back to when he'd first adopted L. He'd never legally adopted the boy, but he'd raised him. That pale young child he'd found alone, abandoned in the park by his parents.

He'd already opened his orphanage for gifted children, Wammy's House, by that point, but he only accepted children who proved themselves to be gifted in some way. The thing that stopped him from just calling the cops and leaving the situation to them was…how calm the boy was.

Quillsh had seen a great deal of abandoned children in his time and the vast majority of them were a crying mess for hours after they'd been left. The small group who weren't crying and screaming spent all their time in a state of shock, doing nothing and staring off into space. This child was different, though. He wasn't playing in the park, but he also wasn't in shock. Instead, he was crouched near the entrance, drawing in the ground with his finger. He was focused intently on doing this, paying no mind to the surrounding world or how alone he was.

It was peculiarly composed and Quillsh found himself with the inexplicable feeling that this child was special. He didn't call the police. Instead, he spoke to the child, took him by the hand, and led him back to the orphanage. He would talk to the authorities at a much later date, but he would make sure that he raised the boy there.

The boy muttered that his name was L during their talk. Quillsh wasn't

sure at first if that was actually the boy's name, but he insisted that it was and that his parents taught him how to write out his name. That it was one of the only things they took the time to teach him themselves and that he was used to being left alone for long periods.

This more than anything convinced Quillsh that he was correct in thinking that there was something special about this boy. For a child so neglected to be displaying such a high quality of speech…

Quillsh brought L into the orphanage and took him to the playroom where there were several other children, both older and probably younger than L. He asked them to keep an eye on L for a moment and left to go get some new clothes for the boy. As he was heading back, he heard several cries of pain and took off at a run back to the room.

There, he saw L standing calmly in the center of the room, the other children all collapsed around him, crying and beaten. L himself looked fine, standing completely untouched and without a hint of exertion. Quillsh had stood frozen in the doorway, staring at the carnage in front of him.

"Y–you can't do this!" One of the children cried out weakly, lying curled up on the ground and holding their likely broken arm to their chest.

"Why?" L peered back at the child that spoke. His tone was so mild and unemotional that the question might have seemed genuine. That is, if the corner of his lips weren't twisted up slightly in the hint of a smile. A small smile that spoke only of an unfeeling humor. "What are you going to do? Tell your parents?" He inquired, knowing full well that they could do no such thing.

The cruel question, said with a coldhearted mockery, and the havoc wreaked by this eight year old was the first time Quillsh got a clue

about what kind of person this child was. If he kept him, he knew that L would require a lot of time and resources, not to mention dedication, from himself. He would certainly cause trouble, no matter what. He'd thought hard about it, he really had.

"What happened here?" Quillsh heard himself ask.

"They were using violence on me, I protected myself." L answered, not looking the least bit afraid.

"We weren't!" One of the kids cried out, tears running down their face. "We thought he looked lonely so we were only trying to hug him! He's a liar!" Quillsh had a feeling the children were telling the truth and he wasn't quite sure if L even believed they were trying to hurt him or if he just didn't like them for whatever reason.

But Quillsh would admit to not being a very good man, himself. He was an accomplished inventor and had decided to dedicate his twilight years to furthering his accomplishments by founding an orphanage for abnormally intelligent children. The whole reason he had opened an orphanage and accepted any of these children into it was because they were exceptional in some way and he could use that.

He hadn't the strength to ignore the potential benefits of having this child in his orphanage just because he mistreated the others. He would be willing to overlook L's treatment of the other orphans and dedicate more time and effort to L specifically if he got a larger return on investment than the other orphans could provide.

He decided that he would try to soften L's rougher habits, but that the others simply would have to learn to avoid L. That would be best for all involved.

L quickly proved himself to be exceptional beyond anything Quillsh could have imagined and far superior to his peers at the orphanage. Having provided L with several tests at first, L graduated to making requests to Quillsh, who decided to indulge them as a way of measuring the boy's worth. Quillsh watched carefully what L did with any of the things he was provided with.

Quillsh didn't interfere for some time, but he was nonetheless quick to realize the potential the boy was showing in his activities. Quillsh would be the first to admit that perhaps he had indulged L too much. Within reason, he gave into each and every one of L's requests due to a combination of it being easier to give him what he wanted and interest in seeing what would come of it.

L eventually asked for a computer, so Quillsh got him one. L's eventual response was to start solving crime cold cases. The boy, Quillsh learned, was always looking for challenges. Additionally, L seemed to gravitate towards things that others have proven themselves inadequate at doing, such as solving particular cases. At one point, L even managed to solve a string of bombing cases and narrowly averted world war 3.

L was special to Quillsh in more ways than just his intellect, although that by far made him the biggest asset. L was the only child that Quillsh had ever adopted himself. Every other child was taken into his orphanage but that was about the extent of it, while L was both Quillsh's ward and his adopted son. Eventually, managing L - his greatest success - became Quillsh’s life. It was his day job and his night job. Enabling L to do his jobs efficiently and taking care of whatever needs or dirty jobs he needed done.

He had tried to recreate his success with L with other children in the orphanage and L eventually showed some interest in having a successor. Quillsh saw some success with them, but he could never quite recreate L. What happened with B and A was an unmitigated disaster…quite unfortunate. The harsh expectations and teaching

methods wore down on many children mentally, but it was for a purpose. However, they had some decently worthy successors for L, so it seemed the experiments were worth it.

L's nature and Quillsh's indulgence led to L having little to no social interaction outside of himself. His time at Wammy's House he spent holed up alone in his room and that didn't change as he got older. L had never had a friend and he'd never had a romantic partner. Indeed, L had never shown any sexual interest at all towards another individual. Even his hormonal teenage phase was understated for a boy his age. And as for a long-term relationship, L had never been adequate at responding properly to other people's feelings or holding ordinary conversation on ordinary topics.

All that to say, Quillsh felt he wasn't prepared to handle this particular situation. Someone showing apparently genuine interest in L in a way that his ward couldn't ignore. Of all the preparations Quillsh had made for his son's future, this was not one of them. In truth, none of the children from Wammy's house were expected to have significant others or children of their own. Actually, it was the opposite. Being isolated from others allowed one to be more productive and relationships were a distraction, more often than not.

They weren't taught *not* to have families, but being orphans and growing up in a competitive environment where objective success mattered more than anything else…almost every one of them came to the belief that they shouldn't form attachments. L was no different in that regard. He had never had a strong relationship with anyone and if he had, Quillsh would be the one that knew about it.

B and A had the strongest relationship among the children at Wammy's and that didn't end up being the best thing. They were also the most promising candidates out of Wammy's, but well…

Quillsh - going by the name of Watari for now - watched through the cameras as L and Light Yagami failed to realize they were still holding

hands. The two were staring each other in the eyes, not saying a thing, while the other investigators looked like they didn't know what to do about. Watari didn't know the last time he had seen L look so off-balance. It seemed this investigation had been trying for him in several different ways.

Light Yagami was an enigma, Kira or not. The boy seemed to be an old soul in a young body, mature and collected throughout the ordeals of the Kira case. In that way, he seemed to adhere to his father's account of him. It was in his behavior towards L that he differed. The boy - from the very beginning, it appears - had a very strong interest in L and he made no secret of the nature of that interest.

This was…a situation and Watari wasn't sure whether it was a problem or not. Ordinarily, he assisted L with anything he needed but let L decide when he needed it. This time…he wasn't sure if he should step in at all. In the area of interpersonal relationships, Watari may have failed L, but Light seemed to be doing his damnedest to rewrite that. Unlike his child, he wasn't sure this was a bad thing at all.

He'd have to wait and see how it developed.

~ ❶ ~

Once again, Light was practically fawning over Matsuda. It appeared that no act was too small for Light when it came to that man, anything was worthy of praise. And Light absolutely lavished him with it. If Matsuda came to an obvious conclusion, it was rewarded. Any compliment he gave Light was reflected back with double the intensity. This had been going on for hours.

He had long since started getting annoyed with the way the two were acting and he couldn't put his finger on why; he just was. He scowled harder whenever Light leaned in closer to Matsuda to whisper to him.

One would think it was Matsuda that Light has a crush on, L noted with irritation as he glowered at the pair happily chatting on the couch.

L was used to being mildly irritated by the incompetence of others, but this wasn't quite the same feeling. On top of that, he wasn't used to feeling like there were things he couldn't do. Anything those morons could do, he surely could. Anything he couldn't do wasn't worth the effort. But now a thought swirled in his head like a vicious, sharp blade as he watched this go down. L couldn't talk as freely and excitedly to Light as Matsuda could. Matsuda, for all his flaws and failings - of which he had *many* - spoke without reserve and didn't seem to have trouble finding the words to say what he wanted to say.

L…has never been good at talking to people on their level. Speaking… *recreationally* . He was able to give his rationale and reasoning as well as describe his plans, even if they were heavily redacted, but when it came to charming people…

L felt something similar to resentment - but not quite - curling in his gut, directed at Matsuda. The man was a complete fool, eager to please like a puppy, and completely useless for anything other than fetching coffee. Why was it that he had such an ease with speaking when L was more accomplished in every way and yet he struggled with the complexities of social interactions? Dealing with others still baffled him more than otherwise, so why did this utter moron find it so easy?

And why would Light have such an interest in him? L had always known that he had difficulty with social situations, it was a large reason why he preferred not to deal with people directly, but this was the first time it bothered him. Usually, social interaction was an annoyance that had nothing to be gained from and so L didn't concern himself with it. Now, however, as he watched Light smile brightly at Matsuda, the two leaning close to each other to talk excitedly about some show…L wished he knew how to do that.

To ramble on for minutes about some meaningless TV show or movie, compare pop idols or some other such thing. Even though L did have an interest in pop idols too, he wouldn't be able to act the way these two did over it. To laugh and smile and gush about it. He couldn't talk carelessly the same way they were now and Light was talking to Matsuda about things he would never say to L. That thought irked him even as he told himself that he didn't have the time to listen to such pointless gossip in the first place.

L wheeled his chair around so that he was facing his computer setup, his back to them. *I should be glad he's not rambling to me about all of that. Matsuda is making himself useful by soaking it up like a sponge. It's illogical to be upset about it.* L tried to distract himself from his irritation by working. It wasn't like he expected either Matuda or Light to actually be productive to the case, so it really shouldn't bother him what they were going on about. Matsuda was an idiot and Light was Kira, so the case could hinge on neither doing their jobs.

He was probably just bothered by how strange Light's interest in Matsuda was. How nonsensically it seemed, coming out of nowhere, especially with the two not seeming to know each other beforehand. Still, if Light - as Kira - was trying to recruit *Matsuda* of all people, then he could go right ahead. L told himself that he should just *focus on his work* and figure out how to get Light to slip and expose himself as Kira instead of just a mooning teenager. If Light got closer to Matsuda, that might even work in his favor. So what if Light's fixation on Matsuda seemed strange? He should just ignore what was going on. He should just ignore… *ignore*…

Finally, he could take it no longer. "Mr. Matsuda." L said, not looking away from his monitor.

"Yes, Ryuzaki?" Matsuda's excited voice hurriedly replied.

"I have need of your services. Could you please report to Watari for instructions?" At the same time as he was speaking, he was typing up

a message to Watari, instructing him to give Matsuda busy work to keep him occupied for some time. Matsuda's deep desire to please was written all over his face, he would jump at the chance to be useful for something other than getting coffee or making copies.

"Really? I'll be right there!" Matsuda exclaimed loudly, audibly jumping up from his seat.

"I'll help." Light surprisingly added, getting up from his seat much more calmly.

Absolutely not. Light was his prime suspect, he couldn't just be allowed to traipse around without L to observe his behavior. "I'm afraid you're needed here." L cut in. "I'm sure that Mr. Matsuda will be fine on his own and Watari will take care of him." Light looked at L like he didn't believe him.

"Don't worry, Light. I can handle it, don't worry. I won't let you guys down!" Matsuda said and L caught sight of the man putting his hand on Light's shoulder in a comforting manner. His irritation flared stronger, not in the least helped by the fact that Light actually seemed to accept his words where he didn't accept L's.

"Alright, then. If you're sure." Light hesitantly replied, giving Matsuda a smile. Matsuda left with a great deal of excitement, slamming the door behind him. A second passed and then the door opened again.

Matusda stuck his nervous and embarrassed head back into the room. "Uh, excuse me? Which room is Watari in right now?" L told him and Matsuda gave a laugh and a word of thanks before closing the door again.

L waited a few more moments and then dedicated to take advantage

of this opportunity he'd gotten. "Light. Please come over and sit next to me, if you would. I have something to discuss with you."

"Surely Light can work over here." Soichiro Yagami spoke up, from his spot a little further away. His statement would have come across as casual except for the look on his face. Wariness and displeasure.

Ah, yes. That bit of uncomfortableness. A few hours back, when Light held his hands and professed his intent to never hurt him, L had gotten lost in the moment and his own thoughts. When one of the investigators finally interfered and brought both of them back to the situation at hand, it was already too late. All of the JPD members in the room had heard what Light had yelled and more importantly, seen them holding hands. They already knew about Light's crush on L and that incident made it clear to L how much the situation disturbed them.

He could understand. Light was younger than him and a suspect in the case. He was the son of their beloved chief and a very lovable boy on his own. He had a crush on L that was well known and now he was spending time with said crush. And they thought L was morally challenged.

So yes, he understood. But it was still very annoyed by it because Soichiro had taken to eyeing L with suspicion. He'd already done that, but his investment in his job and the case had kept it at a minimum before. Now, the incident with his son was making it rise back up again.

"It's fine, Dad." Light thankfully intervened, shooting the older man a smile before going to settle down in the chair next to him. "So what did you want to talk about?" He asked L.

L hummed. What *did* he want to talk about? "What's your interest in

Mr. Matsuda?" He wasn't sure that was what he intended to say, but it was too late now. He had to stick with it.

"Touta?" Light blinked, surprised by the topic.

Something dark and sharp lanced through L's chest. *Touta?* Touta. Matsuda's first name and Light was using it. Why was Light so irritating? It was the boy's specialty. "Touta. You two seem unusually close. It was my understanding that you two didn't know each other before this case." He probed.

"We didn't." Light replied, a curiously confused look in his eyes. Slowly, it spread to the rest of his expression as he stared at L.

L shifted uncomfortably but endeavored to ignore. "Then may I ask why you two seem so close now?"

"Well, Touta is very friendly." Light started, his intrigued gaze not wavering from L. "And I just really like him. I can't say why, exactly. I think we'll be good friends."

Touta. Every time Light used the man's first name, it was like another blade of annoyance was being shoved through his back. "I see." He didn't say more and he was pretty sure that no emotion showed through his voice and yet it was this very statement that made Light's expression clear up a little with understanding.

"Wait…was that? Are you…" Light appeared to work through something and stopped talking. "It's nothing. What are you working on right now?"

What *was* he working on right now? L glanced surreptitiously back at his primary monitor. Light's school record was on his screen. L's fingers flew across the keyboard and pulled up a different screen, utterly refusing to look at Light to see if he saw it. What did he just pull up? Light's meeting with Naomi. Flick, click. New window. A documentation of Light's various visits to the police department preceding it. Oh, for the love of--!

"You research me a lot." Light said with a shit-eating grin, not sounding the least bit surprised as he peered over L's shoulder.

L felt his eye twitch. "You were a suspect, I was just doing my job." He stated.

"And am I still a suspect?" Light inquired, leaning closer.

"..." L felt that whatever he said, Light wouldn't believe it. Just as well. Whatever he said was going to be a lie. "It's a 4% chance that you're Kira."

"Oh, I'm sure." Light smirked.

"You don't believe me." L stated.

"You're right, I don't." Light acknowledged, still smiling. "I think you're a liar."

"Hmm." L hummed, pressing a thumb to his lips to prevent the smile. Light was strangely good at saying things that should be insults in the least insulting tone possible.

When L didn't say anything else, Light took the initiative. "Do you think I'm a liar?"

Yes. "Maybe. Are you lying about something?" L asked, not expecting an honest answer.

"Many things." Light replied, easily. "I try to be truthful when I can, though. I think you're lying about a lot of things, too. Not just how much you suspect me."

"What else do you think I'm lying about?" L stared at him.

"I think you're lying to people about why you're trying to catch Kira." Light pondered, aloud. "Or at least deceiving them."

L blinked in surprise. That wasn't what he expected Light to say. "Why I'm doing it?" L pressed.

"Uh huh." Light leaned even closer, their faces nearly touching as he brought his voice down to a whisper. From this distance, L could feel Light's breath on his cheeks and see that smirk still on the boy's lips. "You say you're all about justice, but I don't think you are. I think you lie every time you say you care about right and wrong."

Something creeped up L's spine at Light's words mixed with the brunette's obvious enjoyment. The feeling of someone stepping on his grave came to mind, but in reality, it was probably just Light getting dangerously close to something.

“What makes you say that?” L investigated.

“Just a feeling I get, but I have good judgment about these things.” Light said.

“And what do you *feel* that I actually care about?” L asked, with some pique.

Light lifted a finger and pointed directly at L’s chest. “Yourself and your own interests. Letting people know how smart you are and finding entertainment to keep life from being so boring for you.”

How does Light always read me so well? L’s hand clenched tightly onto his chair. “Did you know that feeling?” He wanted to deny the assertion, but he wanted to know the answer to that question more.

“I did, once.” Light’s smile became less sharp as he said this. “But where you and I are different is that when I say I’m looking for justice, I mean it.”

Yes, Light and Kira both seem to really believe in a kind of justice. That, L felt comfortable labeling as truthful. “Maybe that’s the case.” L allowed a little bit. “If it is true, would that change how you feel?” He felt uncomfortable directly talking about Light’s crush.

“Nope.” Light smiled brightly. “Not in the slightest. If anything, it makes me like you more.”

L startled. …*what on Earth? WHY?* “I don’t think many people would agree with that.” He managed to say, sounding calmer than his thoughts were.

“Probably not, but I’m not like most people.” Light replied. With one more smile, he leaned back and returned his attention to L’s computer screen as if nothing had happened. Light reached out and began typing and clicking around on the screen as if the computer were his own.

L just watched him, finding everything that was Light Yagami perplexing.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas!!

Bonding Time

Chapter Summary

> Light and L continue their little chat and we get some Naomi time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Light didn't know how long L watched him work before he spoke up again. "Light, may I ask you a question?"

"Of course." Light stopped working and gave him a smile. "What kind of person do you think Kira is?"

Light's lips twisted up sardonically. "Are you asking me that as an investigator or a supporter of Kira?"

"Either. I want to know your whole mind about Kira. I'm interested in knowing what causes someone so intelligent and law-abiding to favor Kira over the law." L stated.

Buttering me up, huh? Light considered his answer shortly. "I guess the short answer is that I believe in Kira." Light admitted, making sure to keep his voice low so that the others in the room wouldn't hear it.

If L hadn't told anyone about Light admitting to being a Kira supporter yet, then Light certainly wasn't going to do it. "As for the kind of person I think they are…I think that Kira is someone who's willing to go to or past the edge of conventional morality to try and help people. Someone who doesn't view the world in black and white. Someone works to help as many people as possible rather than trying to change how people *are* ."

"I see…that's quite the speech." L hummed, pausing for a moment. "And this assessment has led to you believing in Kira?" He prompted, leaning forward.

“I’m not going to say that Kira’s way is the only way or that killing serious criminals is the absolute answer to the problems of society, because I don’t think either of those things.” Light sighed. “But I think that it’s a solid method that saves a lot of people.”

“Even though it also kills a lot of people?” L interjected. "Some of which may be innocent?"

“I don’t…” Light seriously considered not responding to this question honestly, but knowing the conversation was still just between him and L for the moment, he felt the strong urge to be genuine here. “I am not someone who views all lives as being equal. I've never been. I’m prepared to see significant differences in people depending on who I’m looking at.”

“…I’m surprised to hear you say so. It’s not something many people would admit to.” L said.

“Maybe so. It’s certainly a loaded statement and a career killer in law enforcement.” Light acknowledged. “But it’s how I really feel. I don’t think all lives are equal. That isn’t the same as saying that some lives are meaningless, just that there’s a scale that I use to judge their worth in comparison to others. It’s not something that people like to admit to because it makes them sound and feel like they are evil or coldhearted. It’s not the neat or clean morality of judging everyone equally, but the world isn’t neat or clean, is it?”

L didn’t move to answer so Light continued. “This scale has endless variations. Is a criminal’s life more important than a police officer’s? That’s one of the easiest, but some questions are harder to answer: Is a

pregnant woman's life worth more than a teenager's? These questions are hard to answer but life forces people to make choices like that in one way or another.

Maybe an officer hesitates to shoot an escaping criminal goes on to kill another officer or maybe the law fails to punish a wife beater sufficiently and eventually that individual murders their spouse. In those and many other situations, one life comes at the expense of another, even if the individual refuses to choose. If a paramedic only has time to save one of two very injured people and refuses to choose one over the other, they both die. So do they let both die or do they save one, since both people dying only heightens the tragedy and helps no one? If they do save one, how do they choose which, assuming both are injured enough to die before being helped second? They scale. In my mind, refusing to choose between people is in itself a choice that has consequences."

"I see what you mean." L pondered, aloud. He, too, kept his voice low. "The world will force a choice whether the person considers themselves to have made a choice or not. And you're saying that you hate indecisive people."

"Hate is a strong word. By taking charge of our opportunity to make decisions instead of avoiding them, we have the chance to avoid a worse outcome." Light said. "It's more accurate to say that I'm irritated by them. I don't think that you can change reality by conviction alone. Try as you might to argue otherwise, the sky is still blue. You can't forcefully change it to be something else by denying the reality. In the same way, I don't think insisting narrowly that all lives are absolutely equal to each other makes it true. Or that we don't have to choose. While I can appreciate the morality behind seeing all life as equal and I absolutely disagree with judging people's lives as superior because of their ethnicity, sex, or income, I think that it is deeply insulting to insinuate that a schoolteacher's life matters as much as a rapist. Insulting and actively problematic when it comes to preventing crime."

"And that's why you support Kira." L concluded. "He's decisive and he

judges criminal lives to be less than those who haven't committed crimes."

"Broadly, yes. I don't think the current legal systems are completely awful, but I don't believe in them nearly as strongly. I don't feel like the legal system's general response of imprisoning people for a few years and then regurgitating them back out prevents many crimes, a lot of repeat offenders have been let out only to commit more crimes. Even life imprisonment creates problems, even though it avoids the repeat offender problem. And of course, that's only if a jury can be convinced of the person's guilt or if they become convinced of the right person's guilt. It's easy for people with money and influence to skate by or even hide serious crimes. The system gets bogged down by it all and I feel like it's slow and ineffective."

Light huffed out a laugh. "And then Kira comes along and they are able to cast judgment efficiently without long-winded arguments from high-paid lawyers or drawn-out court cases and it feels like a breath of fresh air. No worries that someone is going to escape justice because their lawyer poked holes in the case against them or because they went on the run and ran to a country that doesn't extradite."

"And without accountability." L pointed out. "Judgements made by a fallible human being who can be biased or make false judgements and yet doesn't answer to anyone. There's no information available on how Kira judges the seriousness of someone's crimes or how he determines their guilt and there's no way to hold them accountable for their actions when no one knows who they are."

"You're completely right." Light admitted, to L's visible surprise. "What?" Light asked upon seeing the expression, though it was a front. He knew *what* .

"I admit I didn't expect you to agree so easily, especially since you support Kira." L responded.

“Oh, I see that.” Light nodded. “But just because I support Kira doesn’t mean I don’t acknowledge any of the flaws in their system or their ways of doing things. Supporting someone doesn’t mean you think them flawless.”

“I suppose that’s true.” L pondered, quietly. He still didn’t look like he liked it.

“Both sides have problems. The traditional law in many countries has lots of holes exploited by those with connections, doesn't act as a deterrent like it should, and suffers from the downsides of needing a group of people to agree on a verdict. While Kira casts unfettered judgement on people remotely, knowing no limits while being beholden to no one.” Light pondered. “But Kira isn’t hurting anyone without a serious criminal record and they are getting results.” And he was. It wasn’t as dramatic as it was near the end of his reign in his previous life, but as he had predicted, crime rates had fallen dramatically as a result of the Kira killings becoming public knowledge.

Which was the whole point. Kira deterred violent crime because criminals were scared out of their mind about a supernaturally powered killer of criminals that was nameless and faceless. Light had the power to investigate and take out those who instigated violent crime, but his only power to deter said crime from occurring in the first place came from how frightened he could make people of being caught breaking the law. It was a level of fear that the police and law enforcement in general can't command unless they're operated by a dictator, which was not really preferable. If he lost the fear factor, then the crime rate wouldn’t drop that much.

The fact of the matter was that he made them absolutely terrified. Heck, he even scared law enforcement and he hadn’t even needed to kill the FBI agents to do it! The general public was an exception, but they were something else entirely…

“Kira hasn’t killed anyone innocent *yet* .” L corrected him. "And that's only officially. Appeals are happening more and more often these days."

“You can’t judge someone based on something they haven’t even done *yet* .” Light parried with, feeling deeply the truth of it. “Disliking someone for what they *could do* instead of what they *have done* isn’t very logical.” He teased, lightly.

"You're avoiding the issue of there being unknown innocents in Kira's killing spree." L pressed.

"Well, that's part of what's hard about it. Because there could be." Light answered honestly. "Just like in conventional law enforcement, innocent people are convinced and some of them die. It's nearly impossible to avoid. I'm not going to call it a necessary sacrifice, but what I am going to say is that if someone is too paralyzed with indecision for fear of making a mistake in a conviction to do anything, they'll do nothing and people will still suffer. Clearly conventional law enforcement has already decided that if you try to be careful, the risk is worth the reward. Maybe Kira decided that too."

L’s lips tugged further into a frown, seemingly irritated. “Kira has every reason to escalate their behavior in the future, I won't simply take it on faith that they won't. They have every reason to target lesser criminals or law enforcement officers in the future. The police won’t stop until they catch them. If Kira wants to continue, they’ll eventually need to lash out at law enforcement.”

“Will he?” Light gave a serene smile.

With some good humor, Light recalled how the world governments

actually gave into him pretty quickly in the first timeline. First, it was the US government pulling back after their FBI agents were killed, not wanting to risk any more of their people's lives carelessly. Then there were the JPD officers initially assigned to the taskforce walking out en masse…then the higher-ups in general deciding that they'd rather L show up on TV and be killed than any of them after the Second Kira entered stage left.

The world governments sending him names after L died…the US President being blackmailed and refusing to help Near…

Light certainly was prepared to not get arrogant again and underestimate the world governments, but he would really have to disagree with L about how determined they were to stand up against him. They weren't all L. The task force members were special for a reason, even without being geniuses. For all of L's self-interested actions, he had been willing to die in the course of his investigation in a way that few others were.

"Maybe Kira is determined not to hurt people if they don't think they deserve it, even if they are determined to run the risk of being captured." Light offered.

L hummed as he took a moment to mull that over. "Kira does seem to view himself as a benevolent God." He said, glancing significantly at Light as he said it.

"God?" Light jerked, blinking at him. He'd called himself nothing of the sort! Not this time, anyway…

"Do you not think Kira a God of justice?" L peered at him, calculating.

“I never said I did.” Light insisted. “Kira’s probably just a person. A person with strange abilities, but a person.”

L’s expression went more neutral than normal, which made him think that L didn’t know what to make of his proclamation and didn’t want to show it. “I see. I had assumed you viewed them in that way because I have become aware of much of Kira’s fanbase saying so online. Many believe him to be some kind of god, here to save our world.” The slight derision in L’s tone made it clear exactly what he thought of that.

“Well, that’s them. Other people can think whatever they want, but I don’t think that way.” The fact that he was actually a God of Death was absolutely not the point right now. L was definitely trying to imply he thought Kira saw himself as a God. *It’s probably because the level to which I publicized my acts makes me look like an attention whore,* Light considered.

“I apologize for making assumptions about you.” L apologized.

You don’t mean that. Light smiled brightly. “It’s okay, it happens. But what was it you were saying about Kira seeing himself as benevolent?”

“Kira seems to think he’s a virtuous person, despite what he’s done. Kira seems to have lofty ideas about good and bad.” L responded.

What is he getting at now? “Are you calling Kira dramatic?” Light checked. It would be funny, if he was. Especially because he could imagine it being true.

“Maybe.” L replied, a small quirk to his lips, revealing his humor at Light’s question. “Just that Kira makes a show of how *good* he is.”

Light recalled something. “His *nobility* , you mean?”

"You're referring to what I said during my first confrontation with Kira.” L noted. “I hadn’t realized that you watched that.”

“I did!” Light admitted, easily. “And even if I hadn’t, I would have still found out about it at school. Everybody knows about it and for a while, it was the only thing anyone would talk about.”

“Yes, I can see how that would be the case.” L nodded along.

“The context and your tone of voice when you commented on Kira’s nobility made it clear you didn’t view it highly. Others might think you meant that you don’t believe Kira to be noble at all, but I think the more prevalent element might be something else. I wondered at the time if maybe it wasn’t that you didn’t believe Kira wasn’t noble - unlike the majority of the JPD - but that you simply look down on any nobility that they may or may not have.” Light cocked his head to the side as he stared back at L, not unlike L’s own staring. Light thought that L looked surprised at his pronouncement, but it was a little hard to tell.

L didn’t respond at first, but then interest faintly lit up his eyes. “Maybe. I will make an admission…” He started and Light found himself growing excited, in turn. “I believe sentiment to be one of Kira’s weaknesses.”

Light’s lips twitched and he struggled to prevent a full-blown smile from breaking out. He never would’ve thought he’d hear someone list one of a serial killer’s flaws as *caring too much* . “You do, huh? That’s a really weird thing to say, Hideki.”

“Maybe so.” L allowed. Light wasn’t sure at all whether or not L was convinced that Light’s noble streak was genuine and not just an act to gain public sentiment. “But does Kira really expect nobility and honor to get him very far?” L looked challengingly at Light while he said it.

“You’re talking about Kira possibly choosing to not kill you back then instead of being unable to do so.” Light stated, looking right back.

L’s lips tugged into a small smile. “It’s a mistake they will regret making. That is, assuming that it was indeed intentional. I believe it’s more likely that Kira simply couldn’t kill me, since we know they need a name and a face to kill and they had neither at the time.”

Ah, there’s some annoyance there, isn’t there, L? Light crooned, mentally. His quick mind immediately picked up the hints of feelings that L was giving off. *You’re oscillating between wondering if Kira let you live or if they tried to but couldn’t kill you, with an understandable slant towards the latter. But not knowing and not being able to prove either conclusion is like a thorn in your side, an annoying twinge that you can’t remove.*

“So you were mocking Kira, just in case they let you live because you think it’s a weakness not to kill your enemies without hesitation.” Light summarized, concisely. “But it’s only a consideration. You still think the situation was that Kira *couldn’t* kill you because you hadn’t met the supposed requirements Kira needs for killing?”

“It seems you understand the situation clearly. This is precisely why I was so eager for you to join the case. Your attention to detail and quick apprehension for circumstances makes you invaluable.” L said, once more clearly trying to play to Light’s ego.

Stroking my ego didn’t work in my previous life, even when my ego was out of control. It’s certainly not going to work now, Light thought with amusement. “Thank you, Hideki. That means a lot coming from you.

Still, I can’t help but find the situation a little funny.”

“Hm?” L cocked his head slightly to the side. “And what, may I ask, do you think funny?”

“Mocking Kira for their sentiment, advocating killing or otherwise ruining your rivals without hesitation…You sound like a storybook villain.” Light closed his eyes and gave a bright laugh.

“Is that supposed to be an insult?” L inquired tonelessly.

Light’s eyelids slid back open and his golden orbs gazed back at L softly, fondly. “Not at all. Not at all.”

~ ❶ ~

Naomi didn't know what to think about what was going on between L and Light. In truth, she didn't know L very well at all. She'd briefly worked with him on a case in LA, but she knew next to nothing about him. Having said that, she didn't know what to make of his relationship with Light. When she'd joined the investigation, L had insisted that Light was just a suspect and only as a precaution.

That had never rang true to her, though she couldn't imagine why he would lie about it until she recalled that Light's father was part of the investigation and the police chief, to boot. She glanced at the man in question out of the corner of her eye. But now she saw it clearly, though she didn’t think L did.

She saw the way L was always aware of what Light was doing and the way he took secretive glances at Light when the boy wasn’t looking.

His apparent desire to have Light physically near him and his obsession with Light being Kira despite all evidence to the contrary. It was easy for her to close her eyes and remember some of those behaviors as her own when she began getting close to her fiance. She'd done a few of those things when she started liking him and she'd caught him doing it too. Maybe it was this personal experience talking, but it seemed obvious to her that L was coming dangerously close to returning Light's unprofessional interest.

…It was probably her personal experience. The other investigators didn't seem to pick up on this nuance at all. The others took for granted that L's obsession with Light was entirely based on his being Kira without returning any feelings, with the exception of Light's father, who definitely looked like he suspected something on L's end. He was clearly doing his best to repress such suspicions, but the looks he gave L when the man got too close to his son said something.

How anyone could misinterpret that scene where they held hands and stared into each other's eyes, I'll never know… Naomi shook her head. She didn't know what to make of this strange relationship developing between the two. In all of her experience with the law, the relationship between investigator and criminal (or suspect) was a relatively uncomplicated one. The two wouldn't know each other personally, the investigator would investigate them while maintaining emotional distance and observing the laws and rules of conduct, and the suspect would attempt to look innocent (or *be* innocent, as the case may be).

You often get the dangerous situation where a guilty suspect tries to run or kill the person investigating them. It was far from the rosy, heart-filled aura surrounding the two now and it made their relationship unbelievable with their current roles. She'd also quickly heard of Light's infamous declaration of a crush on L. The investigators were quick to inform her about it as it had apparently made its rounds around the small group several times. Naturally, Light's known feelings for L made things uncomfortable and complicated.

Not that she blamed a thing on Light! The boy was young - just entered college - and it wasn't unusual in the slightest for young adults to form crushes on more mature adults that they find admirable or impressive. She herself had formed a few shallow crushes on some of her superiors at work when she was younger; wearing the rose-tinted glasses of someone young without experience.

What she wasn't sure of was whether or not she should blame L for this. Normally, she wouldn't hesitate to saddle him with being the responsible one. L was the elder of the two and he was the one in a position of power, so it made sense. Even if Light was the one with the crush and he was the one who was being forward, someone in L's position had to draw a clear line with set boundaries to keep things moral and professional. What she had just seen was most certainly not that.

The reason why she hesitated to judge L on it so harshly was…well, because Light's feelings seemed to floor him. According to her, L was almost as blank as a wall. It was when Light showed an interest in him that she could actually get a read on his emotions and she attributed that to how shaken he was by the situation. Naomi could understand why L wouldn't be as clear-cut and logical about it, given that.

In part, she felt bad for Light. He was such a generous and kind person while also being clever, which was why she felt sorry that his crush on L couldn't really go anywhere. As with many crushes on authority figures, time and reality would have to force those feelings to fade impotently into the ether. However, the rest of her felt uncomfortable with the situation as a whole, as she was sure that her more senior investigators also were.

Having an investigator that was the target of a crush from their "lead suspect" brought ethical questions.

Having said suspect also be the target of 24/7 surveillance that offered them no privacy brought ethical questions.

Having said suspect work on the investigation brought ***ethical questions*** .

And having the investigator who was being crushed on both work with the emotional suspect *and* do basically nothing to deter such feelings in the suspect made the whole thing feel much worse.

She was quite glad - and *relieved* - that Light had been extracted from L a short while ago. It allowed them all the chance to breathe a little bit. Poor Mr. Yagami…he'd managed to keep himself together admirably, given the stressful situation, but he'd been approaching his limit. When they'd noticed that L and Light's hushed conversation had lulled and they were just sitting quietly next to each other, the chief took the opportunity to pull his son away from the detective.

Thankfully, he'd continued to hold himself together like a true professional as he inserted himself between them and gently dragged his son away to the other side of the room. She wouldn't exactly give him points for subtlety, but she didn't think what he was doing was overtly obvious. Well, at least not obvious for the people who weren't already thinking the same thing he was. She wished she could thank the chief of the JPD for his daring move, it allowed them all to ignore the ethical issues in this investigation for at least a few hours longer.

Everyone here besides the aforementioned investigator and suspect duo had official positions in law enforcement, positions which relied heavily upon maintaining high moral and legal disciplines. No one here felt comfortable with the situation and all had voiced discontent early on, but there was nothing they could do about it. L was calling the shots here. In her mind, though, she preoccupied herself with coming up with ways that she could interfere if things on that front became too much.

L could justify whatever he wanted to them by insisting that his

methods would get them closer to catching Kira, but Naomi didn't believe that Light was Kira or that he knew anything about the serial killer. Light hadn't done a single suspicious thing and he hadn't hurt anybody, he was just a sweet boy trying to make the world a better place and for some unfathomable reason, L had honed in on him. She could tell he still suspected him, whatever L might've said to the contrary. More than anything else, Naomi's own instincts said to trust him. Naomi had always trusted her instincts above facts, despite intrusive advice both from coworkers and fiancees. They denounced it as "women's intuition" or being emotional and didn't try to hide how little they thought of it, but she was right more often than not. Even back when she had first met him, Light hadn't felt to her like someone who wanted to harm her. She had never once felt unsafe or in danger when she was with him and that belief in him had paid off! She might not have been able to meet L or even have gotten her fiance back if it wasn't for Light.

She was so incredibly grateful to Light and she looked forward to the day that she could repay even a fraction of what he had done for her.

She respected L for his intelligence and his acumen, but he was wrong about Light.

Why couldn't he see that?

~ ❶ ~

Light didn't say anything when Touta found his way back to the investigation room later in the afternoon. Unusually for him, he decided not to rock this particular boat for Touta's sake. L getting rid of him earlier had come off as strange, but his later realization made sense out of it.

While he still didn't completely understand why, he was detecting

more than a hint of jealousy from L and apparently the man was taking it out on Touta. Not too noticeably yet, but still. But in appeared that L couldn't keep the other man away forever unless he wanted to invent a whole other case for Touta to work on. Unaware of Light's revelation, Touta immediately took up the empty seat next to Light upon returning. Light thought he heard a low growl coming from L's spot but no one else seemed to pay attention to it.

Touta - poor, sweet summer child that he was - just leaned over towards Light and excitedly asked him what he was working on and if he could help.

"Didn't you get all the helping out of your system with Watari?" Light smiled at him to show him he was only joking.

"Not really." Touta rubbed the back of his head. "Not that I'm complaining or anything! Just…after a while…the tasks felt like he was trying to keep me busy."

So I was right that L was pulling something, there. Light thought. "Well, you can definitely join me, then. L's checking my work now about all the notes I made on the known Kira videos. I'm not doing much while I wait." Touta was happy nonetheless and delved into the work while Light showed him what he was working on.

As they worked quietly, Light's mind started drifting. He was pretty bored with what they were working on and he was sure that L would scrutinize it anyway. It was during this drifting that he thought of something. Quickly glancing around to see if anyone was close enough to overhear them, Light leaned in and started whispering in Touta's ear, causing the inattentive man to jump a little in his seat. "Hey, Touta?"

"Yeah, Light?" Matsu looked up from his work with an open

expression, eager to please, as always.

“I was just wondering…why did you join the Kira Case?” Light suspected that he knew the general idea of why, but he wanted to start the conversation.

“Why?” Matsuda looked surprised to be asked. “Because…I took this job to protect people, I signed up for that with my job, so that’s what I’m doing. And well…I’d follow your father anywhere.” He added, bashfully.

Light took that in. It was such a Matsuda answer. He took his job more seriously than most people gave him credit for. Light smiled and leaned in, conspiratorially. “You know L suspected me of being Kira, right? What do you think of them?”

Matsuda, who had leaned in too, now leaned back in surprise. “About who? Kira?” Light nodded, his smile never dropping. “Well…I…” Matsu glanced unsurely around the room, but no one was paying attention to their whispered conversation. Well, except for L. He was over in his seat making a good act of not watching their every move.

Matsu didn’t notice and, seemingly satisfied enough that everyone was ignoring them, dropping his voice a little as he replied. “I hope you know that I would never think you were Kira and I don’t want to offend you or anyone else who’s risking their lives to find Kira with my opinions.” He started, nervously.

“It’s okay. Tell me what you think.” Light assured him, with a serene smile. “I’ll never think less of you for being yourself.”

Touta stared at him with wide eyes at his proclamation. It seemed to make him a little embarrassed, but happy. “I think…well, sometimes I

think Kira can't be all bad, you know?" He phrased it more as a question, glancing nervously at Light.

Light made sure to keep his expression open and understanding. Any hint of disapproval at what he said would make Touta nervously backtrack. He knew from experience. "I don't know. What do you think?"

"Well…" Touta glanced around, nervously. "I--I think Kira's heart might be in the right place. And if they're trying to help, doesn't that mean that they're at least trying to be a good guy?"

"Well, they *are* only targeting criminals." Light pretended to think about it. "It seems more likely than anything else that they're trying to improve society. Either that or they have a bone to pick."

"What do you mean?" Touta asked him. "Bone to pick?"

"Well, their targeting of criminals could also be a personal distaste or a revenge thing for something that happened to them in the past. Maybe they or someone they care about had been a victim of violent crime in the past and maybe that's why they're doing it."

"I didn't think about that, but that makes sense." Touta looked thoughtful.

"For what it's worth, though, I don't think that's the case." Light offered.

"Why?" Touta blinked in surprise.

“Because Kira doesn’t seem to have a strong preference for punishing one kind of criminal over any others, as you would expect someone acting out of personal experience would. If they were a victim of one or two specific types of crime, we would expect to see Kira killing primarily or even completely in that league. The fact that most violent crimes that Kira troubles themself with are roughly even in their body count says it’s not personal. Not overly so, anyway. More of a detached sense of justice or right and wrong guiding them than anything else.”

Touta’s expression brightened up considerably. “You’re so smart, Light! You’re right, that makes a lot of sense!”

Light stared at him for a bit. “You’re interesting, you know that?”

“Me?” Touta asked, looking startled.

“Yes.” Light smiled, brightly. “I think most police officers, especially one in your position, wouldn’t be able to see Kira as anything other than the enemy. A crazy serial killer. The fact that you’re actually trying to understand them and where they’re coming from is really interesting. I don’t think there are many people like you.” He meant every word.

“Not really!” Touta shook his head, hurriedly. “It’s something anyone can do!”

“But not everyone would bother to do.” Light pointed out. “Empathy doesn’t come naturally to everyone and even then, there’s a limit to how much a lot of people can feel. Everyone has their own limits, but there’s a reason a lot of people have trouble empathizing with criminals or other groups of people. It’s not because they can’t feel empathy or anything of the sort, it’s just that it’s past their limits.

You're one of those people who have much further limits and pushes themselves to understand other people who are very different from them. I respect you a lot for that."

"I…" Touta just looked so shocked and his cheeks were tinted red. Light took pride in garnering that reaction. "I don't know what you say. Thank you, Light…that's such a nice thing to say."

"I like to think I'm a nice guy." Light said with a little laugh.

"You definitely are!" Touta nodded, rushing to reassure him of the truth of it.

"If I'm being honest," Light decided to say after a moment. "I hope that Kira isn't evil, too. I'd like them to not be a bad guy, even if they clearly aren't working within the law, either."

"You do?" Touta was just going to keep looking shocked throughout that whole conversation, wasn't he?

"Yeah." Light smiled, softly. "I want to believe that neither Kira nor the police are bad and that they just have two opposing ways of doing the same thing, which is trying to protect people."

Touta looked pensive for a long moment as he seemed to consider something. Then he admirably gathered himself and said it. "Do you think Kira would consider working with the police?"

So his optimism continues, Light thought fondly. *Somewhere inside himself, he wonders - maybe hopes - that things could work out where the police and Kira could work together and pool their resources.* "I don't

know if that's the right question to ask." Light allowed, not sure how he wanted to even answer something like that.

"Then…what's the right question to ask?" Touta said, confused.

Light huffed out another laugh, shrugging his shoulders a little. "Would the police consider working with Kira?"

~ ⓚ ~

With a few more clicks, Light made the social media post. There it was.

"Is it finally time?" Ryuk asked excitedly, looking down at the screen over Light's shoulder.

"Yep!" Light smiled, brightly. The Misa Situation was starting to get underway. Preceding this, Light had asked Ryuk to do some stuff for him while he was distracted by L. That stuff included watching Misa and stalking her stalker. They didn't need to wait for the stalker to try to kill Misa and doing that was cutting it kind of close anyway.

Misa hadn't known who her stalker was in the previous timeline and so Light hadn't known, either. So they had to figure out who it was to kill him. Light knew from Misa's fame as a model and primarily the whole incident with her parent's murder where she currently was before she would come to Japan. It was difficult, but eventually one person emerged as continually following her around. Once Ryuk had determined who her stalker was, he relayed his name to Light. Light looked the guy up online for a photo and then the rest is history.

"How do you know Misa will come to Japan this time if she isn't the second Kira?" Ryuk asked.

"Because Misa is arrogant like that. She believes that she has complete control over other people's feelings." Light replied, his complete distaste for the girl in question practically radiating from him. "It wasn't *really* being the Second Kira that made her confident enough to approach Kira. She'll probably tell herself that she'll make Kira love her, even if he doesn't. And even if she doesn't decide she loves Kira when she thinks it's L, she'll still want to be of use to him after what happened with her parents."

Because that is what Light remembered most about her. It didn't matter what kind of person Kira was or how they viewed the world or what they were looking for in a partner. She would still remain convinced that she could somehow force them into loving her. Light was certain that she didn't see it that way, but as far as he was concerned, it was exactly what she was doing.

She had this romanticized idea of love, but when applied to reality, that "romantic" idea ended up being more controlling and bordering narcissistic. In her view, she can *make* someone she loves love her if she just tries hard enough. If they don't, then she takes that as a suggestion that she just needs to try harder rather than an indication that they are their own person with their own needs and desires. In that way, she robs the other person of their personhood by reducing them to a living reaction to whatever she does.

More than anything, Light resented her for that. For forcing her way into his life, threatening him and the people around him to get him to date her, and treating him like he wasn't entitled to his own feelings all while claiming to love him. She said she'd be willing to do anything for him and he'd truly tested that, but in the end, it was for her and her own obsessive love. Her obsession drove her to need him in her life and all her service for him was for the purpose of keeping him there.

Ryuk peered carefully at Light's disgusted look. "If you hate her so much, why did you save her?"

Light sighed. "Because even though her behaviors and actions were disgusting and all of her own choice, I can't help but feel guilty for my actions, too. Even if I was her boyfriend under protest, I definitely took advantage of the situation to try to get her killed and to get her to kill others for me. She's a self-interested stalker, but I used her shamelessly, nonetheless."

"You can't be blamed for that." Ryuk pointed out, helpfully. "It's natural to be angry at the person forcing themselves on you. And if the situation's shit anyway, might as well use it."

"I know." Light smiled a little, thinking about how spending so much time around each other ended up making them think alike. "It would be more in line with the Shinigami mindset to let nature take its course and let her die as she was meant to. No lovesick Shinigami to save her this time. But my human side is being less reasonable about it. Those emotions are saying that I hate her, I used her, I was terrible, she was worse. It's making me act in a way that I acknowledge isn't the most reasonable or clinical…"

Light leaned back in his chair, his gaze going elsewhere. "In that way, I suppose helping her live is a mixture of my guilt and resentment towards her. I felt guilty not lifting a finger as she was murdered, but I also resent her enough to use her once more, this time as a way to further trouble L in his goal of catching me. Sometimes even I don't know how I feel about something or someone. Just a riot of contrary emotions swirling around. But such is being human, I suppose." Light gave a breathy laugh. "I'm not looking to torture Misa this time around. After everything, I hope she lives her life and stops stalking people like a complete mental case. But I haven't forgiven her yet, either."

“Being human sounds exhausting.” Ryuk lamented. “I’m glad I’m not

one.”

“Make fun of me, will you?” Light nonetheless smiled indulgently as his winged friend. "Now, we need to see if she'll take the bait."

The bait being what he had just done, of course. But it wasn't just a matter of having to wait until she showed up in Japan, not yet. There was still more to do, but Light had just taken the first step for that. Naturally, he couldn't convince Misa of L being Kira unless the theory was readily available. In fact, to be the most convincing, that idea should be *everywhere* . It was human nature to give more credibility to things that are repeated often, even if the evidence backing it up is severely lacking.

In the past, there had been a few individuals that tossed around the idea that L and Kira were the same person, but it was largely viewed as just another online conspiracy theory. Light wouldn't be surprised if some officers had seen the theories, resulting in them being even more wary of the nebulous L. And as obviously wrong as the theory was, Light could understand where the idea came from and why some people had wondered about it.

L was someone who lived in the shadows and who had only become known to the world when he publicly confronted Kira on TV. Until then, only members of law enforcement who had been to the Interpol meetings knew of him and even then, he was a faraway and mysterious figure that most didn't even know how to contact. His reputation as a shadowy and unknown figure made it easy to doubt him and think the worst.

Plus, L and Kira were adversaries, so they were linked together in people's minds. It wouldn't be that far of a mental jump to see them as the same person, especially since both their faces and true identities were currently unknown to the public. These kinds of suspicions turned out to be true in a different way; L was actually pretending to be multiple people. Light remembered L admitting to being the top

three detectives in the world and he may have even more identities he didn't know about.

All in all, it wasn't absurd to think L *could* be Kira. The thing that's absurd about it was what his motivation could possibly be to stage a war with himself playing both sides. All the theory needed to gain more traction was some more well thought out arguments and a lot more people passing it around.

Light was more than happy to provide the first criteria!

He'd already created a Kira fansite which he posted this official theory on, but he took it a step further by creating multiple accounts on various social media sites and posting different versions of the same idea on each of them. He took precautions to make it seem like these accounts were owned by different people, such as staggering the timing of posts and having a few of them reference each other for their ideas. All of this increased visibility and coverage.

Of course, the number one thing that got the posts shared by more people was how sensational the idea was. The more exciting Light could make the possibility sound, the more people would love it.

"You really aren't taking it easy on your man, are you?" Ryuk cackled, reading one of the posts over Light's shoulder.

"L likes things rough." Light shrugged, unapologetically. "Besides, he's not gonna take it easy on me, either. He certainly didn't last time. We've always matched each other well." Light paused for a moment. "I'm actually eager to see how the thing with convincing Misa that L is Kira turns out."

“Really?” Ryuk turned to him. “You’re usually pretty good at

predicting how things will go."

"Usually." Light hummed. "But Misa has a talent for being a wildcard. Also…she wasn't terribly interested in L personally the first time around. Half the time, she seemed to hate him, although how much of that was because she was actively on Kira's side is arguable. I'd be interested to see how she reacts to him, believing that he's Kira. What will change…and what won't."

Light tapped his chin as a grin spread across his face. "I find I like there being something that I don't know the answer to."

Ryuk cackled. "You're such a strange guy sometimes, Light. It always made you so interesting."

Chapter End Notes

We get a little more of Light's thoughts towards Misa, too.

Valentine's Upload

Chapter Summary

There's a bunch of love talk in this chapter! And some things get set up for...

Chapter Notes

“Little” bit late 😓 First few weeks back at school are a bitch

See the end of the chapter for more notes

L gritted his teeth at the screen of his laptop. Not for the first time, he loathed the stupidity of other human beings. It wasn’t surprising that a large part of society was starting to support Kira and it was far from a recent development, but he still felt profound irritation in it. Several accounts across social media platforms were posting in support of Kira, utilizing the perceived anonymity of being online and they were being shared and commented on by innumerable individuals.

Comments were split between those against Kira, those in favor of Kira, and those who haven’t picked a side.

What are the chances that they’re all dummy accounts made by Kira to try and control the masses? L pondered morosely, navigating through the various tabs.

These kinds of posts had first started showing up not long after the Kira killings, the popular nickname becoming the killer's official name. After the somewhat disastrous challenge over tv, the support had grown. Many took Kira's announcement using Taylor's body as proof that Kira was both just and all-knowing. It was a great boost to Kira's image, even among the older demographic. L was unused to seeing posts about himself as had been cropping up ever since Lind L. Tailor. Until that moment, L had been largely unknown outside of Interpol.

After his confrontation with Kira, his anonymity had taken a hit. The public now knew his name and that he was after Kira and their annoying speculations were causing the internet to implode.

What was worse, Chief Yagami had recently informed him that he was receiving growing pressure from his superiors. They were pressuring the elder Yagami for information on how the case was going and what the investigators were doing. It was quickly becoming apparent that the higher ups in the Japanese police force were growing skeptical of the legitimacy of the case. The annoying thing about most government groups was that they were obsessed with having something to give to the public to placate them. If they didn't have something that looked good, they conflated that with doing a good job or being effective.

L had never once concerned himself with caring about what others thought of him. However, he had learned long ago that if he didn't throw the world leaders or department heads a bone once in a while, they would cause him no small annoyance with their increasingly persistent inquiries and refusals to provide assistance in times when it was necessary. He still hated it.

He'd been able to push most of the responsibility to fielding their inquiries to Watari in the past, but this time Chief Yagami's superiors know that he has a direct line to L through the investigation. And if Chief Yagami was to be believed, they were making complaint after complaint. It was…aggravating. None of them could even prove Kira's existence and yet they take issue with L's methods and results. As if they had a better option over him. L refused to dignify them with a response.

~ Ⓚ ~

"Can you stop typing for five minutes?" Light growled out, rolling over to face the man in bed with him. He squinted his eyes open to glare. L was sitting hunched in his usual posture, typing and scrolling through his laptop. The man never fucking slept, the heck.

The owl-eyed jerk didn't even glance away from his computer as he answered. "I understand my habits are making it difficult for you to sleep, but I can't stop working for the several hours it takes you to rest.

"Damn your efficiency." Light snarled, rolling over and pulling his blanket over his head.

"Are you saying that as Light or as Kira?"

"As Light!" Light snapped. "Wanting sleep is not a scheme to make you solve the case more slowly."

"If you say so." L acquiesced. There was a pause in which Light quietly simmered. "Maybe I could try typing more quietly for an hour or so."

Light huffed and didn't answer, shutting his eyes tightly. True to his word, L's typing was ***much*** *quieter after that and Light finally managed to drift off.*

In fact, it sounded like L had stopped typing completely.

That was the dream Light had that night before he woke up and headed back to the hotel with his dad. It was a common dream Light had had after L's death. Light found it funny, you would've thought that what he would remember most were the big moments between them…the helicopter ride where he regained his memories, the promise they made to catch Kira together when he'd first forgotten everything, the explosive fight they had when Light realized L had given up. Maybe one of the dozens of mind games they played with each other…but no.

In Light's experience, the things that came to him the easiest were the little moments, the small things. The feeling of L's hand in his own. The gleam in the man's eyes when he became interested in something. How L's breathing sounded on the rare occasion Light had been awake to see him sleep. These were the things that sprang to mind when he thought about his relationship with L.

His most common recurring dream was the memory of that nothing night where they didn't say or do anything out of the ordinary. Just another night sleeping chained together, another annoyed bickering session. Yet he remembered every detail of that stupid scene, the way L smelled and the comfy blanket he'd wrapped himself in. And it made him smile. He felt warm inside being able to remember those peaceful, quiet times in the midst of all the drama and death.

Light wanted to create more memories like that.

Light blushed a little and smiled dopily as he listened to L mumble. The man was seated by him and was dictating some of his thoughts to the group. His dad leaned forward attentively while others like Aizawa and Matsuda looked more than a little lost. Light was enraptured though. Not by what L was saying really, they were just miscellaneous theories about what Kira's goals *might* be. L's voice got pretty low when he got lost in his thoughts and started muttering and Light wasn't sure when he started finding that attractive. How had he ever managed to convince himself that he didn't care about this man? Of all the lies he'd told himself, it was the one he'd had to invest in the most.

Light winced as another, much less pleasant memory resurfaced. One he couldn't think about without a spark of pain. It was of the evening he spent at L's grave after the man's death.

Left alone for the first time after it had happened - minus Ryuk who

never really left him - Light had almost expected L to pop out of the ground like the zombie he'd always looked like. To pop out of the ground and gloat about how he'd tricked Light again, even as he knew deep down that it wouldn't happen. He'd won. L was dead.

A dangerous emotion had welled up inside him the longer he looked at the grave. The Light of the present easily recognized the emotion as grief, maybe even regret. Grief for losing the man he'd refused to let himself care about. Regret for having taken things as far as he did. But the Light of the past hadn't been ready to acknowledge it all. He hadn't been ready for that level of self-awareness and pulling at the thread of one emotion would have unraveled him.

So instead, he choked off the sob that rose in his throat, with the expertise of someone barely aware they were even doing it, and forced it to come out as a laugh instead. It was a breathy chuckle, coming out under his breath, produced from the mangled remains of what was supposed to have been a show of sadness. Once started, he couldn't stop. Another chuckle followed it, then another. If he didn't laugh, he'd cry and his mental state had already deteriorated to the point where his prized self-control was slipping. Before long, he was barely breathing through the laughter as it reached a fever pitch.

His legs gave out under him, but he turned the weakness into a strength as it brought him even closer to where L laid. I won…I won… Light gloated about his victory over L aloud, too invested in convincing himself he was happy at L's death to check his surroundings for any other people.

He had to be happy at L's death. He *needed* to be happy at L's death. Because if he wasn't, there was something wrong with him. It was something to be celebrated. The man who claimed he'd kill Kira but failed. This was his victory over his nemesis, after all. If he wasn't happy now…then what was he?

Ryuk would tell him much later how crazy he'd looked that day. How

deranged. For the life of him, Light couldn't remember for himself how he must have looked. He'd been too busy "enjoying" the moment. Forcing himself to enjoy it. Light could only imagine though…just how deranged someone who needed to be happy about losing everything had to look.

Sometimes Light didn't understand his past self. Even though he remembered making the decisions he had and his thought processes, it could be hard to look back and understand what made him think the way he did. He supposed he should take that as a good thing for how far he'd come from then, how much he'd grown.

"Uh…Light?" He hadn't noticed L turn to look at him until L called out to him. "Is there something on your mind?"

He noticed my mind was somewhere else, huh? Light smiled easily as he came up with an answer. "Actually, there was something I was thinking about. I got you a gift." Without waiting for an answer, he bent down and dug around in his bag. When he came back up, he had a packaged strawberry cake from the bakery section of that cafe they went to. It actually was pink because it had strawberry jam mixed in with the batter and then it had whipped cream and strawberries on top. Light told him that as he held it out to him.

L stared at him unblinkingly for a long time, as if he were offering him a live bomb, but slowly - very slowly - he reached out and took it. "Thank you, Light."

Light beamed regardless of the reception, just happy that L didn't reject the gift. He kept the smile on his face as L placed the cake on the table and went back to talking with the rest of the group. Light tried to pay attention to what they were talking about, but it wasn't long until his mind wandered again. This time, to his activities on social media.

I've been pretty active with my dummy accounts for a while, Light contemplated. He'd saved Misa a while ago. Things weren't proceeding exactly at the same time as they did in his first life, but since she didn't have a death note this time - good riddance, Rem - he didn't have a strict timeline for him to work on. Still… *Maybe it's time I drop the last hint on the account about L's general location. If things go well, I'll just have to sit back and wait for her to show up after that.*

~ ❶ ~

Misa's family had moved to America years ago and that's where she started her modeling career. She had barely started out in her career when her parents were murdered. The fact that she was a debuting model was just notable enough to be bandied about in the news and they wouldn't leave her *alone* . The media was everywhere, hounding her! Demanding answers to outrageously invasive questions, as if having her loss shoved in her face several times a day by complete strangers wasn't bad enough.

And then the trial. The *trial* . It started out fine enough and she believed that the system would get justice for her…she just had to go through the motions to get it. She was so stupid to think that! Everything was fine for the first couple days, but then things went downhill from there. The defense started casting doubt on her reliability as the only witness to her parent's murders and the man had had no known connection to her family or a criminal past and so they pointed out repeatedly that he didn't have any motive.

They called it "suspicious" that Misa had been the only one to survive the night and insisted that she should have died after Misa testified that the defendant had seen her before he left the house. They called her a liar and made it sound like she could be a suspect in her own parent's murder, even if they didn't come out and say it! But the worst wasn't over yet…the man must've gotten a friend to lie about being with him that night for an alibi. That friend testified they were out drinking together, but didn't remember the name of the bar and wouldn't look her in the eyes when they testified.

It was an absolute nightmare and she had started having near emotional breakdowns every day. She got prescribed antidepressants only because she was determined to see the trial through and get justice for her parents, it had just gotten too hard to get up every morning without some help. Those horrible reporters were at it again after talk of an alibi reached them and they started pushing the idea that he was innocent. She couldn't go to sleep most nights as the case dragged out further and further, tortured by the idea that he could get off for her parent's murder. That he might be pronounced *innocent* . She didn't know what she would do if that happened, she just couldn't handle it.

And then some journalists took pictures of her getting a refill for her prescription. More than half of the article they wrote about it was lies and assumptions. They made it sound like she was a druggie who was abusing prescribed medication! Those horrible people didn't care about her health at all, they just wanted to make sensational headlines to pad their own pockets.

She put a hold on her modeling career for a while in the hopes of avoiding the additional stress, but the days were becoming so difficult and she didn't know if she could keep going on like this…if it would just be better if she joined her parents. She never felt safe again after her home was attacked, she didn't have any other family left, and now every day she was being attacked and hounded both in court and out by people who had no business in her life!! She was barely hanging on….

…and then Kira killed him.

He was dead. Dead! And he couldn't hurt her anymore and she wouldn't have to look over her shoulder again. The court cases ground to a halt, with the defendant dead. The news articles ramped up for a short time after that, with people pressing for her thoughts on the death, but with the consensus being that he was killed by Kira - a spontaneous heart attack like all the others - most of the media came

to the conclusion that he had been guilty all along and that Kira's justice had prevailed.

Misa certainly thought so.

The guy's friend who had provided the alibi never came forward to insist on his friend's innocence. No, he looked like he tried his best to disappear and Misa was both terribly angry at him and grateful for it. Finally it was all over and she wanted it to stay that way.

Kira had saved her and gotten justice for her parents…when her life had hit rock bottom and she didn't know how she was going to live, he came in like her savior and slayed the evil man that had plunged her life into hell. She started to follow news of Kira avidly after that, it was the only thing she had to look forward to for a long time. Although she slowly got back into modeling work, her devotion to Kira remained both the most important part of her life and a secret. Kira had saved her and her parents, she owed him her life so she existed only for them. No matter who they were, she would do anything to help them, anything at all!

She created fake social media accounts so that she could talk about how great Kira was and connect with people who supported him like she did. It filled all her personal time, but she would do anything if she could actually meet Kira and let them know how much they meant to her. What they had done for her. Kira was her God.

It was a long time afterwards that she started to run into a particular theory circulating around the internet. She avidly followed word of Kira and their activities and she giggled about every juicy theory she read, but this one was different. It started out feeling as silly as all the others…L being Kira was pretty interesting even if it was silly. People threw ideas around all over the place online about who Kira might be, everything from celebrities to God himself, but they never stuck. L was famous too, but Misa had only heard about him recently, when she watched a recording someone posted online of L's challenge to

Kira.

She had been super angry at the jerk when she heard what he said about Kira! When she was watching the video for the first time, she'd been on the edge of her seat, holding a pillow tightly to her chest as she practically begged Kira to just kill him and give that jerk what he was asking for! She thought for sure that Kira really would, but even though the man who was doing the broadcast died by the end, she had been too amazed by the time it happened to cheer.

The guy wasn't even the real L…and Kira had *known* . Kira really was amazing, a god on earth! How else could he have known something like that? She didn't even consider it when *she* was watching. She was amazed when Kira exposed L's evil in front of the world like that. No one got one over on Kira, they saw through any deception. L just saw firsthand that Kira was here to expose the evil and corruption of the legal system and the law!

She'd initially learned about the broadcast from social media and found the recording there and once she'd watched and rewatched the recording about a dozen times, she took to social media again and read more of the comments and conversations that had been posted immediately following when the broadcast had initially aired. The oldest comments were in Japanese since the broadcast only aired in Japan, but following the posting of it online, people had translated it to English and eventually other languages and so more comments in other languages followed as people around the world discussed L and Kira.

From the way the guy talked during the broadcast recording, it sounded like he was some big shot in crime fighting or something. Misa really hadn't heard of the guy at all before then. She checked online and it looked like she wasn't the only one! Most people who were online during and following the event had already chimed in saying they didn't know about the guy and asking if there was someone who did. What followed was a bunch of comments echoing the same idea, asking if *anyone* had heard of the guy. It was like he came out of nowhere and appeared overnight with the police's

support.

She hadn't seen anything about L since the broadcast and she'd definitely looked, even though Kira was still her number one priority and she still had her career to work on. She hadn't heard of L challenging Kira again or anything big like that, it was like he disappeared after that. She hated L - absolutely hated him - for talking to Kira that way. Talking to Kira like they were a criminal, calling them evil…

That was, until the theory came up again several months later. This time, it sounded more serious rather than someone just making up things online. Then it came up again and again. Misa didn't know why this one theory was blowing up so much, especially since she'd first seen it months ago, so she started looking for it more online. The more people talked about it, the more convinced Misa became. Instead of laughing about it and dismissing it like last time, she thought about it more.

The more she thought about it, the more it started making sense to her. The people online were right! L being Kira would explain how Kira had known about the fake L during the broadcast and why L felt so comfortable challenging Kira to kill him! Because L *was* Kira so he knew he was safe. Some versions suggested that the whole thing was staged so that Kira could pretend to be his own rival. A few even said that L/Kira did it so that he could control the police investigation into *himself* . It was brilliant and exactly what she expected of Kira.

Suddenly and with rising awe, she no longer hated L. No, she began to see this mystery person as her very own savior. She became convinced of its truth. Who would be more likely to be Kira than him?

Then the best post ever happened!

One of the accounts that she'd started following after they posted a bunch of pro-Kira content, including posts about L being Kira, suggested that L was in Japan. It was on a thread where people were talking about what L has been doing these last few months, whether he's been laying low while working on a plan or if he's given up on catching Kira. A lot of comments had suggestions about where they thought L might be physically and this was where Misa found the suggestion that L was in the Kanto Region of Japan.

The commentator insisted that it was the only place L *could* be. L had announced during the broadcast that they'd narrowed down Kira's location to that exact region of Japan. Whether L and Kira were one and the same or different people, the user insisted that L wouldn't be caught dead anywhere else but where the action was. It made perfect sense and what convinced her the most that it was true was that an hour after it was posted, the admin had the comment deleted. If it didn't hit a nerve, there would've been no reason for it to be deleted by anyone except the user, so it must be true!

Misa got so excited reading this that she couldn't help but scream in delight. She had to know! She had to know if L was there and if he was Kira! Misa didn't think at all about the possibility that she might not be able to find L, she didn't think that far at all. Instead, she spent all night thinking about the possibility of meeting Kira and not wanting to waste her chance. The next morning, exhausted and excited, she called her agent and demanded they find her some work in that area, saying she wanted a trip back to Japan.

She had a decently large fanbase there and she had hardly ever traveled for her job before so even though her agent objected when she first called and insisted on it, they managed to get a job for her soon enough. It wasn't very big, but she'd already been a supporting lead in a TV series in America by then, so her work came and then she had her foot in the door. She could get more deals, she was sure of it!

In the meantime, she was going to find her Kira!

“Light, can I talk to you about something?” Soichiro asked one night as he was driving them both back to their house.

It was a regular routine for them to drive back after spending a weekend working on the Kira case. Sometimes they spent the night at whatever hotel they were at, but it wasn’t often.

"What is it, Dad?" Light asked, looking at him. The two of them had been enjoying a more relaxed relationship since their talk.

"I wanted to talk about…you and L." Soichiro started, hesitantly. "We need to have a conversation about this."

"Oh…okay?" Light shifted a little, but he knew this conversation was going to happen at some point. Honestly, the fact that he held it together these last couple days said something. Light knew he was being about as subtle as a jackhammer. Apparently, so was his father tonight.

"L is quite a bit older than you, I want you to remember." Soichiro said.

“Okay…” Light prodded, shifting uncomfortably.

"But honestly, it isn't my biggest point of concern.” His dad pushed on with the determination of a man who had already had this conversation several times in his head. “My biggest issue with it at the moment is that this man is investigating you for murder."

"Right…" Light said. Yeah, that was a really concerning fact if you weren't a Shinigami in a past life.

"Aside from the fact that a relationship with him at this time would be a huge breach of protocol - at least it would be if he worked inside any agency - and I worry that it would be a tool for him to use to investigate you further. The lengths the man has already gone in the pursuit of Kira, I'm afraid, doesn't really instill me with confidence that he wouldn't go even further." Soichiro's hands gripped the steering wheel tight enough that his fingers turned white.

"Like locking me in a cage to make sure I can't have access to the news?" Light asked without thinking, peering curiously at the man.

Soichiro's hands tightened even further. "I would shoot him myself before I allowed him to do something like that." He gritted out harshly, taking Light completely by surprise.

"Really?" Light asked, thinking back to his past life where Soichiro had allowed that very thing. Then again, he had tried desperately to talk Light out of it and then insisted he was imprisoned as well alongside him. Maybe something about this route had pushed his dad to the more extreme end. The thing was, Light couldn't tell from Soichiro's voice if he was exaggerating or not.

"Light." Soichiro said, steadily. "I'm sorry I haven't been there for you in the past, but I promise that I'll be there for you from now on. Like hell would I allow someone to use their power to take advantage of you like that, no matter who they are!"

Oh, Light blinked.

"I just don't want you to get hurt." Soichiro sighed, closing his eyes tiredly.

"Dad…" Light said quietly, feeling his father's concern for him. "I understand. Really, I do. This situation isn't really ideal for anyone, but I really want to work with it."

“Why?” His dad asked, almost desperately as he gripped the steering wheel. “Of all the men in the world, why this one? This is not a relationship you should pursue without taking it seriously. If you just want a short-term relationship…”

Light cut his dad off before he could continue. “I am taking it seriously, Dad. I promise that what I want isn’t a relationship that’ll be over in a couple of months, I want something more than that.”

“What about this man do you like that much?” Soichiro’s genuine confusion made it impossible for Light to become angry on L’s behalf. It was clear from his tone that the man truly didn’t understand what Light was thinking. “So much that you may wish to spend part of your life with him? If you’re just impressed by his reputation, then I beg you to reconsider, Son. It’s not a basis to form a relationship.”

Light was quiet for a moment, but when he spoke, he asked a question instead of answering. “Dad, what was it you liked about Mom when you were dating?” He’d heard some stories from his mom, of course, but rarely from his dad and it had been back when he was little.

Soichiro seemed startled by the question, but after a few seconds, he settled into a thoughtful quiet. “Your mother has such a gentle, sweet soul, you know…” He started slowly. “My parents always told me to find a nice girl and to get married with her and settle down. Have kids and a family. And one day in high school, I met a nice girl. I saw Sachiko.”

The man paused contemplatively before continuing. “She was a cute girl who was incredibly nice, sweet, and kind. She was one of those people that no one had a bad thing to say about. It wasn’t hard to fall in love with her, not for me. She brightened up every room she was in. She wasn’t excitable and high-spirited like some of the other girls her age - like your sister is - but she had a soothing presence about her that made all my troubles leech out of me.

With her my school, home life, and eventually work was less stressful. She was waiting for me after my day to listen to it all. You know your mother has enough patience to fill an ocean, a trait of hers that I’ve benefited from endlessly over the years. She waited for me to finish college and gain experience before we married, knowing that it was important to me. Over the years, she’s accepted my dedication to my job without a moment’s complaint, only showing concern for my health and taking care of me even at my busiest.

She’s unwaveringly supported me through our young and adult lives when many other people would have found it too stressful a lifestyle. She’s stuck with me through it all. Your mother is a remarkable woman.”

Light listened to his father reminisce with wide eyes. He watched as his dad’s expression softened and his darkly colored eyes shone with a deep love the longer he went on. Light felt warm at the show of love his father still had for his mother. It had been so long since he got to see them interact as lovingly as his father described, so it was nice to hear it.

I wonder if L and my relationship will mature that way, Light wondered fondly.

His dad was certainly right about his mother being gentle. Though he couldn’t say he always felt supported - feeling like she held him to a

difficult standard much like his father did - but she'd also been the one taking care of and checking in on him and his sister. Sometimes when his dad had been pressuring him hard, it had been his mother who urged him to give Light a little bit of a break. She would have to be forgiving and accepting to marry Light's dad, given the life of a policeman.

"It's the same for me. I think L is remarkable too." His father made no answer and so Light continued. "I *am* impressed with his track record and what he's managed to achieve. That's true, but it's not everything." Light allowed his gaze to drift as he talked. "L is so smart and so clever, I enjoy talking to him. We can talk for hours during the investigation and never grow bored, but we can also be quiet. I'm really comfortable sitting next to him and working quietly without either of us feeling the need to fill the space with talking."

Light felt a small smile grace his lips. "It's weird being around him because he never changes and yet he's always managing to surprise me and I enjoy surprising him. I want to know everything that goes on in his head. Other people like Mr. Aizawa might find his habits irritating or bizarre, but I think they're cute. They're just so uniquely L that I can't help myself. What I want more than anything is for him to find me interesting too. So interesting that he'll never want to leave."

"...That reminds me a little bit of your mother and I." Soichiro said quietly. "Undeniably different and yet something similar…" His father drew off then and the two sat in contemplative silence. They were quiet the rest of the way home until they pulled into their driveway. Once the car pulled to a stop in front of the house, Light opened the door and started to get out, but he was stopped by his father's hand on his arm.

"Dad?" Light questioned him, glancing back at him.

"Light." His father said heavily, his brown eyes serious. "Even if you say you feel strongly for him, I'm not ready to give you to him yet."

Light laughed. “You make it sound like we’re getting married.”

“I know you’re in college now and soon you’ll be starting a life of your own.” Soichiro said. “With the way you were talking, that life might be with L. But as your father, I’m simply not prepared to give either of my children to someone else yet. If L returns your feelings, he’ll have to go through me first. If he wants my son, he should be able to at least do that much or he’s not good enough for you.” He finished with resolve.

“The *Greatest Detective In The World* isn’t good enough for me?” Light asked with raised eyebrows.

“Being the best at his job doesn’t mean he’ll be even a halfway decent partner. Trust me.” Soichiro grumbled, crossing his arms with a huff. “It’s my job to protect my kids. Anyone they want to date had better be able to handle more than I can throw at them.”

Despite himself, Light felt his lips pull into a small but genuine smile. He huffed out a breath of laughter. “I’ll leave the gatekeeping to you then, Dad.”

Soichiro unwound a little at his words and returned the smile with one of his own. “Well then, we ought to get in the house soon or your mother will be worrying about us.”

Sayu was way ahead of them both, it would seem. She wrenched open the door just after Soichiro finished speaking and stood in the doorway. “Hey, you two!” She called out to them, ignoring their mother’s approaching voice telling her to stop waking up the neighborhood at this hour. “What are you doing out there? Come inside already and tell us about your day!”

~ ❻ ~

A Shinigami that looked like a large skeleton with a small head and moth-eaten wings dragged himself across the barren wasteland that was the Shinigami Realm. His gate was very small and he was so slouched as he walked that he was nearly bent in half. After what appeared to be an eternity of making his way across the almost featureless expanse of land, the Shinigami got to their destination.

Several other Shinigami were already there, not really waiting for them. The group of Shinigami, all with their own unique appearance, were crowded around a large viewing port in the ground, with some of them hunched over it to get a closer look.

“Heard something interesting was happening.” The Shinigami commented, nudging into a space near the viewing port.

“Chronos is always interesting.” One of the Shinigami near the edge of the group responded. "The question is: what is he doing *now?* "

"Trying to sleep with some human." One of them answered. "Don't know what's so special about him."

"If Chronos likes him, there must be something." Another muttered.

“Well, knowing Chronos, whatever happens next has gotta be fun.” The skeleton settled down to watch.

Chapter End Notes

Hope I say it enough, but I love you guys! Happy Valentine's Day!

Also, I hope I did Misa's character justice now that she's an actual character and not just Light's recollections of her. Also! Both L and Misa trolling the forums ^v^

Fuse

Chapter Summary

"How quickly do you think I can get him to marry me?"

“I’d give it…about four months.”

“You think it’ll take me that long?”

Chapter Notes

Light being Kira.

Light also being L’s biggest supporter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What on earth are you two watching this again for?" Their mother came into the living room and levied a skeptical look at the TV.

Light and Sayu had been tuned into "Misa! Misa!" for about a week. She'd come to Japan recently, ostensibly for a music tour. Of course, she was trying to tap into her fans in Japan and get more work over here, but only Light knew the real reason she decided to do that.

Well anyway, when his sister started obsessing over Misa coming to Japan, he was able to smoothly insert himself and start watching with her. He'd already indicated an interest in such things anyway, so it wouldn't seem out of character if it were analyzed later on. These days, Light and his sister were spending a lot of time watching Misa on TV and he could tell it was starting to annoy their mother.

Misa was doing some small acting roles lately, but it was obvious she was putting more attention into releasing her album and the reason for *that* was obvious too. Each and every one of her songs were ladened with thinly-veiled allusions to Kira, followed by messages of love. He had to give her credit; even if Light hadn’t had a central role in experiencing her obsession with Kira, he would have still suspected

what her songs of love and dedication were referring to.

It wasn't as if she knew about Shinigami anymore so she couldn't make her coded messages like before, but her references to Kira were still pretty obvious without being so direct that she could be called out on it. If asked, she could still write the lyrics and allusions off as unrelated. He could allow himself to admit - albeit reluctantly - that Misa could be plenty intelligent when she wanted to be and she did have some very clever ideas. Still, seeing through the frame that she was doing all this just to meet Kira, it came off to Light as a desperate cry for attention.

Light was a little uneasy knowing Misa was in Japan again, but he was also curious about how things would unfold from there. Misa was probably writing and performing these songs, hoping that she could get Kira's attention, but that wouldn't have worked, even in Light's past life. Kira - unless they were a fan of hers - would just ignore her antics in any world, if they even noticed them.

And L, the poor man Light was trying to convince Misa was really Kira, had no way of knowing that he was expected to reply to her in any manner. Which meant, like all stalkers seeking attention, she would escalate. Light just wasn't sure what form that escalation would take, but that was fine.

He liked surprises as much as the next time-traveling, scheming, reformed-megalomaniac who has died and been reborn multiple times.

The weeks passed, the investigation progressed nowhere, and - Light noticed - Misa's appearances on TV calmed down a little bit, which meant she was probably about to do something. MIsa had still yet to escalate by the time Light and his father somehow managed to arrive at the worst time, right in the middle of an argument between Matsuda and Aizawa. A better way of putting it was they walked in Aizawa yelling at Matsuda and Matsuda trying his best to defend

himself but looking like the last thing he wanted to be doing was fighting.

“I want to hear you say that again.” Aizawa said. His expression was furious.

“Well…I think…maybe Kira isn’t so bad, actually.” Touta stuttered, but showed a sense of fortitude by pressing on with the statement despite his obvious skittishness. “They at least seem like they’re trying to do the right thing, they’re just not going about it in the right way.”

“How can you say that?!” Aizawa burst out, causing Touta to yelp and flinch harshly at the man’s outburst. “Are you trying to say we should sympathize with Kira after everything they’ve done?! Kira is evil! And that’s all there is to it! He’s just a serial killer who’s killing other criminals! One day he’ll snap and start killing all the rest of us, too!”

"You don't know that, though." Touta insisted, brow furrowed. "You can't judge Kira because of what they *might* do."

"Oh, you're right, the acts Kira has already committed are plenty to judge. Kira's already shown that they have no regard for human life or the law! Why shouldn't we expect Kira to escalate, especially if we don't try to catch him?" Aizawa fired back. "Or are we just supposed to *trust* the word of a *killer?* " Touta flinched back at the word.

Light stood there with his father watching it all go down and felt a little guilty for his part in how this argument probably came about. He remembered quite a few things like this happening in the previous timeline - Touta playing devil’s advocate with Kira - but he’d also noticed that his conversation with Touta had galvanized him in a way.

For someone like Touta Matsuda, who was kind and empathetic but also insecure and casually looked down on by a lot of people, having someone respect his opinion and validate his ideas probably meant everything. Light had validated some of his thoughts and it likely gave the usually shy man the confidence to bring up his thoughts in front of the group.

I don't regret telling him some of my thoughts or encouraging him, Light thought to himself as he watched the argument go on, like everyone else in the room. L especially was watching Matsuda's side of the argument with a calculating look, rather than interfering. *But I feel bad for him, he really doesn't like conflict at all.*

"I'm just trying to say that maybe Kira could be a force for good. If we talk to them and maybe find out where they're coming from, we can help them go in a better direction in the future."

"Kira can go to hell!" Aizawa snarled, vehemently.

"There is no hell." Light inserted smoothly, sliding into the conversation.

He put his hand on Touta's shoulder and gave the upset man a smile. "And maybe Kira can go to hell, but I think putting your fellow investigators through it is too far."

"What do you mean?" Aizawa asked, still angry looking but clearly restraining his tone now. It appears yelling at his chief's son was quite a bit past what he was prepared to do.

"Just that while you may be upset with Kira, that's not who you're directing your anger at right now, is it?" Light asked, rhetorically. "How exactly is getting angry at Mr. Matsuda going to hurt Kira?"

Light's tone was calm, even as he began to make his position clear.

"That's not what this is about!" Aizawa insisted. "You heard what he said! You don't seriously agree with what he's trying to say, do you?"

"Maybe I do." Light answered without hesitation, flashing Touta another soft smile before turning his attention back to Aizawa. His words stunned the whole group, including the man in front of him. "But that is likewise not what this is about. The issue here is respecting his opinion without trying to force your own onto him."

"What if his opinion is wrong?" Aizawa shot back.

"A lack of moral rightness on his part does not excuse your own." Light said, clearly. The words brought the older man up short, leaving his mouth gaping open. "If he were right and you were wrong, would that give him the right to talk over you? Overwhelming others to the point where they stop speaking their thoughts is always wrong. Why should he try to understand where you're coming from if you won't do the same? That would be a hypocritical expectation."

Aizawa still looked angry but he made no answer, Light couldn't tell if that was because he couldn't find a rebuttal or if he was just too angry to speak. Knowing him, it could go either way. His dad took that opportunity to step in.

“Enough, all of you. This is not the time to be arguing amongst ourselves. It’s best to save our energy for catching Kira.” Soichiro said to the whole room, but it was clear he was talking mainly to Aizawa. Said man wilted under his respected Chief’s critical eye and nodded, slinking back to the fringes of the group.

“You’re absolutely right.” L agreed calmly, as if he hadn’t just been

condoning the argument through inaction, probably just to see what happened. “Please, let’s get back to work.”

Most of the guys quickly got back to their work with the practiced ease of professionals. Touta, Light, and his father stayed where they were.

“I don’t like you defending Kira, Light.” Soichiro said after a few seconds of silence. His words were tinged with worry and it’s not like Light didn’t understand why. It made him sound more like Kira in front of a man who had been investigating him for that very thing. No doubt, his dad was worried about a resurgence of L’s conviction of Light’s guilt. He felt sorry that his dad didn’t realize that L hasn’t let go of his conviction that Light is Kira, not even a little bit.

“I’m sorry, Dad.” Light responded, placing a hand on his father’s shoulder in a gesture meant to comfort him. “But it needed to be done. I can’t keep quiet about something I feel is the truth just to keep the peace, especially if I see something happening that I think is wrong. Arguing might be unpleasant, but it helps more in the long run than keeping my mouth shut does.”

His dad’s expression looked an unhappy sort of pained, but then it cleared and he gave a weary sigh. Smiling at him, he said, “I suppose you’re right and I can respect that. You’ve grown up so much, Light.” Light smiled back, happily.

"He’s right. That was really brave of you, you know, Light." Naomi said with approval in her tone as she came up from behind. She stopped next to him and gave him a look of encouragement. “It was also very nice of you to stand up for Mr. Matsuda.”

"I just didn't like the situation." Light brushed it off. "We shouldn't be picking at each other and Touta sounded so upset even though all he

did was voice his opinion."

“Very mature.” Naomi nodded with a smile.

“Not so mature.” Light smiled, ruefully. He lowered his tone to more of a whisper so that only those included in their small group could hear. “I’m starting to get so irritated with Mr. Aizawa. He’s been nice enough to me when we’re talking, but as long as I’ve been working on the case, it’s like he’s constantly trying to start a fight. He could learn a thing or two from Mr. Matsuda.”

“From me?” Matsuda said, startled. After he’d spoken, he glanced around them nervously, hoping no one heard.

“Of course.” Light encouraged in the same whisper. “You’re always optimistic and hopeful. You push the team onwards instead of dragging it back with petty arguments.” Touta blushed at the relentless compliments. “Mr. Aizawa feels like he’s constantly angry and it makes everything harder.”

"People can be a little hot blooded in times of stress." Naomi said. "Mr. Aizawa is probably just taking the situation with Kira really hard and is frustrated that we haven’t caught them yet. Though I agree that being emotional and angry isn’t going to help things. Don't worry, I'm sure he’ll come and apologize once he calms down."

“You’re probably right.” Light muttered, knowing that Aizawa was a man of “hot and cold” temperament. He gave her a thankful look. "I’ll try to be understanding of where he’s coming from, but I don’t know how long I’ll be able to do that if he keeps this up. In the meantime, there was something I wanted to ask you. Do you think I could visit the apartment that you're staying in with your fiance?"

Naomi gave him a look of surprise. “Well, I don’t see any reason why not, but why do you ask?”

Light gave her his best smile. “I just want to check on Raye myself and make sure he’s okay after his ordeal. Plus, I like hanging out with you.”

Naomi’s expression softened. “You’re so sweet, Light. You’re the most thoughtful young man I’ve ever met.” Her expression became a little morose. “In truth, it’s nothing that we weren’t both trained to deal with. Actually, the incident with Raye’s kidnapping ended a lot better than it could have. With Raye’s job, it was always understood he could be taken hostage for sensitive information or something like that. And, of course, it could've been Kira.” She gave a hollow laugh. It was clear she was trying to dispel some of the heaviness that was in the air now.

Light forced another smile. “Yeah, we should be thankful it wasn’t Kira, after all. If it was really Kira, it would have been a lot more volatile of a situation than just some criminal kidnappers targeting foreigners who stumbled into a situation that was well over their heads. Just keep focusing on how it ended, rather than how it could’ve gone. You’ll drive yourself crazy if you get lost in what ifs.” He advised, trying to comfort her.

“You’re right, Light.” She smiled gratefully at him. “I’ll remember that.”

“I know you will. You’re one of the strongest people I've met.” Light told her, recalling how she’d powered through the loss of her career and her fiance and her chance at building a family in his previous life. Most people would have crumbled at seeing all that they’d valued in life lost all at once, but not her. No, she was made of stronger stuff than that.

“I don’t know about that.” Naomi said, looking down.

“ *I* know.” Light was having none of it. “I can tell. You’d be able to get through anything even if it was hard. Raye’s probably just the same if he has the same career you did, but it still won’t hurt for someone else to talk with him to make sure he’s doing good.”

“I’m warming up to the idea, myself. I think it would be good, too. Since we’re planning on staying in Japan until the conclusion of the Kira case - at least for now - but that means that he’s limited in what he can do for work right now.” Naomi revealed. “There’s some remote work he can do for his job, but it’s not as much as he’s used to so he’s been having to keep himself busy while I’m here helping with the investigation. I feel bad leaving him home alone most days after what he went through. I stayed with him the first few days after he was rescued, but he said that he was fine and I should go so I did. I think it’d be good for him to get a visit from someone else. It might help his mood.”

“You don’t say. Well, I’ll be happy to offer to visit him.” Light replied. The whole situation was breaking new ground for him. By this time in the previous round, the two of them had both been dead. The whole concept of either or both of them moving past what happened and deciding what to do with their lives hadn’t even been a thought before.

That possibility had been eradicated by his selfishness before it was even a thought.

He was interested to see how the two were getting along with their lives in the aftermath of the kidnapping debacle. It was a different sort of change than a lot of the ones he’d been making before. Something completely new, without a parallel from his past. It was nice. Besides, there was something he wanted to talk with Raye about.

“Light, could you please come over here?” L called out to him, distracting Light from their conversation.

“Sure thing, L.” He responded and then turned back to Naomi. “We’ll talk more about this later.” Naomi nodded her assent and Light gave her a goodbye nod before heading over to L, unconsciously smiling happily as he got closer.

“What is it?” Light asked, momentarily redirecting himself to pull a chair over and plop down in L’s general vicinity.

“I wanted to thank you for getting involved in the argument, it was very disruptive.” L said and it sounded like just as much of an excuse as it probably was. Light didn’t call him out on it.

“It’s alright, you don’t need to thank me. I wanted to help Mr. Matsuda, he’s a very nice guy.” Light said, brushing it off. He was confused for a moment when L’s jaw looked like it clenched minutely at his words. *What? Was it something I said? Is he annoyed I’m not sounding enough like Kira to give him ammunition? What-? Oh, right.* Light had almost forgotten L’s attitude towards Touta.

It didn’t come up terribly often and it wasn’t so noticeable since L didn’t really treat the man well in the past, either. It had been clear in the past that L didn’t think very highly of Touta’s intelligence or even usefulness and more or less just focused on finding busy work to keep the man out of his hair while he used the other investigators to actually do their jobs. So his general annoyance at Touta’s existence in this timeline wasn’t a huge contrast.

It was increasingly worthy of note, though. Whereas before - even in this timeline - L had just been disinterested in Touta when he wasn’t causing trouble for him, now he looked annoyed any time he was reminded that the man even existed. Light figured he could guess why, but he did think it strange. Did L really like him that much

already? He didn't know why exactly it happened, but he was reasonably sure that L was jealous of Light's relationship with Touta.

"Yes well, I still wanted to recognize you for your efforts." L said, his tone mildly agitated.

As if you cared about the fight at all, Light thought back. *If anything, you were enjoying it.*

"Thanks, Hideki." Light gave him a smile. "Is that all you wanted?"

L seemed on the verge of saying "yes", even though he really looked like he didn't want to, but instead he said, "I would appreciate it if Light would work beside me for a while. I think that seeing your perspective on a few things would be beneficial to me. You are always helpful."

"Sure, Hideki! I don't mind." Light beamed. "Let me just get a snack and I'll come back. I'm a little hungry."

"No need, I'll have Watari bring one to you." L interrupted him before he could get up, already tapping a quick message out on his phone and sending it.

Huh, Light thought simply, peering closely at L. When he looked away from the other man, it was to write a note in his (completely mundane, non-killing) journal. It was mostly nonsense that looked like it made sense. In reality, it was a code he came up with for him and Ryuk to talk back and forth when he's in a place that might have security cameras. They'd been using their free time back at the house to run through it and practice.

After he finished writing the question he wanted to ask, he leaned back to let Ryuk know he was done and give him a better angle to read over his shoulder. *How quickly do you think I can get him to marry me?* He wondered to Ryuk via the code. Light rolled a pen between his fingers as he let Ryuk read it.

He heard Ryuk chuckle as the Shinigami finished. “I’d give it…about four months.” Ryuk answered after giving it a thought.

You think it’ll take me that long? Light wrote back, trying to stop the smile that his lips were trying to tug into. He glanced at where L was crouched next to him, sitting hunched over in his chair and eating a strawberry cake. The strawberry cake that Light had picked up for him that morning from that cafe, in fact. He had been so happy when L had looked at him with suspicion but still accepted the dessert. It made Light happy and he realized he was starting to form the habit of bringing the man his favorite sweets ever so often.

Ryuk had stayed home the first few days of the investigation. To leave him alone with his boyfriend, was what he said. But inevitably, Ryuk got bored staying home all day on the weekends and all night on the weekdays. Around the time Ryuk started moving things very slightly in the living room so that whoever was there felt things were slightly off without knowing the reason why, Light insisted Ryuk start accompanying him to the hotels. At least the death god didn’t tease them most of the time, content to people-watch instead.

“To get a ring on his finger? Probably.” Ryuk snickered over his shoulder. “To get him to fall for you? Well, you’re probably well on your way to that already, considering he glares holes in the back of that other guy’s head whenever you’re talking to him.”

How interesting, Light thought at that information, sounding very much like Ryuk as he did so. Well, if L wanted to marry him in the next few months, he was going to have to make a better impression on his father. In the meantime, he would need to keep working on getting L

to see how good they could be with each other. A power couple that could terrorize the police from all angles! It could be glorious chaos. L just had to stop being jealous of poor Touta for five minutes and he'd be able to see it, too.

~ ❶ ~

Light really should have seen this coming. He really should have.

It had been a normal workday when Mogi, of all people, slammed open the door and rushed into the room. A man of few words, as always, he said nothing as he quickly went over to the TV and started messing around with the remote.

"Mogi, what are you–" Touta started to ask, calm but with some confusion. That is, before the police chief interrupted him with far more urgency.

"Mogi, what is it? What's happened?" Soichiro demanded, stepping towards him. Evidently, the chief knew Mogi better and so knew that there was something amiss without it being said. The tension and alarm in the room ratcheted up several notches at that.

Mogi didn't answer immediately, his attention dominated the next few, long seconds by the remote. The TV was now on and he seemed to be trying to find the right channel. Without looking away, he finally spoke, "Someone claiming to be Kira has contacted a news studio. They say they want to meet L!" With that, Mogi finally seemed to find the right channel, as he stopped his incessant clicking on the remote and stood back. On the screen was Sakura TV, the infamous tabloid television show that had no actual interest in real news.

"To reiterate," the reporter on-screen was saying. "Someone claiming

to be Kira has sent a letter to our network claiming that they were Kira and that they would kill all of our executive board members if we did not televise their message. While their claim remains unverified, we believe it is too much of a risk not to comply with their demands. Their message will play shortly."

The entirety of the hotel room stood there gaping at the announcement before suddenly bursting into movement. "Get Sakura TV on the phone! I want that letter and I want it dusted for fingerprints!" L demanded, a rare example of him raising his voice. Aizawa jerked into action at the order and pulled out his cell phone.

"What on Earth is going on…" L muttered, snapping his gaze back to Light. It wasn't hard for Light to understand what kind of thoughts must be going through the other man's mind right then. He believed wholeheartedly that Light was Kira, but this wasn't very like Light, so he was trying to find out how to fit what was going on into the information he had.

"I second that! What is Kira doing now?" Touta burst out. He got an annoyed look from L, but that was it. Instead, L turned to the group at large. "Whatever trick Kira is trying to pull, we won't let them get away with it." L declared with conviction, staring directly at Light.

Light refused to dignify that look with any sort of response and instead chose to pretend he was more interested in the news coverage. Which wasn't hard to do. He, too, was surprised by it all, but unlike L, he had an idea of what was going on.

This was almost just like before when Misa acted as Kira and ended up being dubbed his second by the task force and the news media. Then, like before, it probably served the same purpose. *A desperate cry for attention.*

“Sakura TV isn’t picking up! They’ve taken all their lines down!” Aizawa growled, irately.

“Then someone has to go down to the station and get it, then!” Soichiro said. “And while they’re there, they should try and stop the broadcast. This is madness!”

“No.” L interrupted, steadily. “We should let the broadcast play out, but we still need that letter.”

“I’m sorry? You want to let the broadcast play, Ryuzaki?” Touta inserted, cautiously.

“Hmm, yes.” L replied, his usual calm back. “I want to see what this Kira has to say and if they have anything planned. This may be one of our only chances to get more information.” The other investigators as a group seemed to accept that logic even if they looked uncomfortable. Light personally wondered if L would have been willing to let the broadcast run if he didn’t feel like Kira had the upper hand in their little battle. Then again, there hadn’t yet been any threats about some big show of proof of Kira’s power, so…

“I’ll go!” Ukita announced before anyone else, raising his hand as he stepped forward.

“Alright.” Soichiro agreed. “Make sure you use the fake ID.” He reminded the man.

Ukita nodded hurriedly and fled out the door, much the same way as he had in a previous life. Light watched him go with trepidation. As much as he knew logically that things were different this time, he couldn’t get rid of the uncomfortable feeling he was getting from how closely it mirrored that day in the past. The whole scene was giving

him deja vu. Even though it was happening quite a bit later in time now than it had before.

The exact date Misa showed up hadn't really mattered to him and he'd wanted to put it off for his own reasons. Part of it was because he'd really wanted to spend some more time with L before she sauntered in, but also - after Ryuk's prodding - he'd admitted that he was also worried about his dad. When Misa had started her shit the last time, his dad hadn't even been out of the hospital yet. It wouldn't have been as big of a deal if his dad had been able to stay out of it, but the man was *determined* .

Light acknowledged to his friend that he waited longer to make his posts that were supposed to draw Misa in because he was worried about his father's health. He didn't relish the idea of seeing his father in a hospital gown, pale from a week in recovery after a near heart attack, running around trying to track a killer. He didn't know she would pull the exact same move with Sakura TV, but he knew she'd do something big and he wasn't having it while his dad was still sick. The man was fully recovered now, though, and taking charge of the situation, organizing his men and discussing their next moves.

Misa was more-or-less defanged now, so Ukita too should be safe. If nothing else proved that she hadn't somehow acquired a Death Note to spite him, then the fact that the reporter's lines changed did.

Light was sure that in the past, the reporter had said that the letter they received described the deaths of people set to die before the broadcast date. Misa had obviously killed those people to "prove" her identity as Kira. But now, they hadn't said that. In fact, as the remaining members of the team worriedly watched the broadcast continue, people had yet to die at all.

The talk show hosts that had bashed Kira in this life and the last weren't mentioned at all, unlike the last fateful broadcast. There was no channel flipping.

It allowed a huge weight to slide off of Light's shoulders. He truly hadn't wanted those people to be murdered on live TV again, simply to be used as tools to convince the populace that she could kill them. Their only crimes had ever been being visible to the public and having opinions that contradicted Kira. He felt sick that those could ever have been considered enough reason to destroy innocent lives.

"Light, what do you make of this?" L's muttering brought Light out of his musings about a past never to return. Glancing over, he saw L now watching the TV screen and pressing his thumb to his lips in that familiar way of his.

"I think…" Light quickly pondered what he should say and how it would be interpreted. Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that his usual route of staying as close to the truth as possible would serve best here. "...I don't think this is Kira."

"Why do you say that, Light?" Soichiro whirled around on them, clearly having overheard.

"Hmm…" L hummed, sounding unsurprised. "I second that. Why do you say so?"

"Well, it just doesn't feel very like Kira." Light responded, vaguely.

"How, precisely?" L pressed, glancing at him before flicking his gaze back to the screen. "I always felt Kira to be quite attention-seeking." He added with what Light felt sure was a mocking tone.

L, you jerk… Light felt, his eyebrow twitching in annoyance. "That's not what I meant." Light said, somewhat moodily. "I mean, why is

Kira sending a letter to a news station to ‘spread the word of Kira’?” He asked, using the reporter’s words that apparently were written in the letter they’d received.

“Maybe Kira’s just escalating their behavior as time passes, but it’s still weird that Kira hasn’t done that before now and suddenly, out of nowhere…And anyway, it doesn’t fit with Kira’s known behavior. You’d think if they did do something like this, they’d do it in the form of controlling a criminal to get in front of a camera and giving a monologue before having them die on-screen. Not all this reporter's nonsense!” Light went on, starting to get heated.

“In fact, this *whole thing* feels out of character for Kira! If Kira was going to choose a news outlet for this, why is it a cheesy gossip-monger like Sakura TV? I can’t even imagine Kira watching that channel often. And Kira threatening reporters might just be an empty threat, but it’s very out of character to threaten innocent people with death like this. Kira’s always been dedicated to only threatening serious criminals. He’s never tried to hurt people that didn’t adhere to his purpose.” The room was silent for a minute and then the spell was broken by Touta.

“Wow, Light.” Touta said with eyes wide, sounding awed. “That was amazing. You really analyzed the whole situation!”

Light blushed and gave a small smile at the older man. “Sorry about that, I think I got a little too into it.”

“Not at all.” L inserted, his tone unreadable. “Your observations differed from my own, but we both reached the same conclusion. I too suspect that this person isn’t Kira.”

“You do?” Soichiro asked, moving to stand by his son and place a supportive hand on his shoulder.

“Of course.” L replied, as if such a conclusion should be obvious. “Despite the fact that they’re claiming to be Kira, they have done nothing to prove it, which would necessitate predicting a death before it happens. Light was also correct, this feels different from my past encounters with Kira. Like someone with an entirely different personality is behind this. Still, we shouldn’t underestimate them yet. We have no idea how desperate this individual may be yet or how delusional. There’s no telling how they’ll react to being stopped.”

“Then Ukita shouldn’t be going alone!” Aizawa burst out, stomping towards the door. “He could be attacked!”

“Mr. Aizawa, stop. I am afraid I have to ask that the rest of you all stay here.” L called out, causing Aizawa to freeze where he was reaching out for the door handle.

“I’m going.” Aizawa said darkly, but he didn’t move.

“We should listen to L.” Soichiro chimed in, tone serious.

“Why!” Aizawa whirled around, but he didn’t aim it at the chief, but at L instead.

“We don’t know what’s planned yet. It’s better if we can stay where we can keep an eye on how the situation develops.” L started, only to be cut off by Aizawa angrily storming towards him and grabbing his shoulder.

L still didn’t look at the man and Aizawa jerked his shoulder, angrily trying to make him look. “ *What?!* Are you saying we should just wait here and let Ukita go into this situation alone?! What are you going to

do if he gets hurt or worse?!" L made to answer, but someone else intervened first.

"Mr. Aizawa, please let go." Light said as he stepped towards the two, his voice more deadly serious than anyone in the room had ever heard it. Aizawa let go of L's shoulder almost as if out of shock, his expression surprised as he looked at Light.

Light wasn't happy enough with that, though. He didn't stop until he'd reached the two and gently but firmly wedged himself between the two. He faced Aizawa head-on with a steady gaze. "I know you're scared, Believe me, I am too. We all are. But that's not an excuse to fight amongst ourselves. Please control yourself." His tone made it clear that choosing to do anything other than control himself was not going to be an option for him.

Aizawa, shocked out of his anger by Light's behavior, responded with hurt, "Aren't you angry, too? He doesn't care at all what happens to Ukita out there!"

"Of course he cares." Light parried back. Whether L actually did care about Ukita's life or not wasn't the issue for him at the moment. It was the assumption that he didn't that Light wanted to defend the most. "He just doesn't show it like we do. Just because he doesn't yell and fly into a panic doesn't mean he doesn't care. Hideki is attempting to be clear-headed so he can make responsible decisions as the leader of the Kira investigation. We can't afford to make emotional decisions that could end up getting us hurt, even if it's a hard decision to make. Just because he isn't showing off his emotions for all to see, doesn't mean they don't exist." Light defended, heatedly.

"I…" Aizawa looked admonished, glancing away from Light before visibly convincing himself of something and determinedly turning back to L. "I went too far, I apologize, Ryuzaki." He said, bowing to the man.

“That’s quite alright, Mr. Aizawa. I know how hard this situation must be for you and I commend you on your concern for your fellow investigators.” L, who had watched the entire confrontation take place with surprised eyes, chose that moment to speak up again.

“I should be clear, I know that Mr. Ukita is armed and he will be using fake credentials once he gets into the building, just in case Kira is involved. I believe that he should be able to handle whoever he encounters there. However, there are not very many of us on the case and I cannot in good conscience risk many of us by sending out any more of our members than necessary into an unknown situation until we can establish more about it. To that end, I need all of you here where it is safe and where the chances of us noticing something about the situation are better.” L endeavored to explain his reasoning better.

“I see.” Aizawa said quietly, thinking about that.

Light slowly started to relax and slumped into a seat near L. The group started discussing once more what this might mean and whether Kira was actually not involved in any way.

A few moments later, Soichiro’s phone rang. “Hello?” He answered it. He listened for a moment and then turned to the group. “It’s Ukita. He said he got into the building and secured the letter. They wouldn’t let him in until he flashed his badge and he says they absolutely refuse to stop broadcasting. He’s been arguing with their boss about it.”

“Unsuccessfully, apparently.” L commented, glancing at the reporter on-screen.

“At least he’s got the letter.” Touta spoke up with a bright smile. “We

might be able to find out who wrote it if they left some fingerprints."

"Would they really have been so stupid as to touch the letter without gloves?" Aizawa asked, his brows furrowed. Light didn't know that.

"Even if they don't leave fingerprints, they could still have left some DNA on it that we can use to trace them. Hair or skin cells might work." Soichiro contributed his opinion.

"The contents as well may be of interest. Their motives, as well as any accidental information about their identity or whereabouts may be written in there." L concluded, thoughtfully.

"What should we do about the broadcast?" Aizawa asked, looking back at the TV with a troubled expression.

L thought for a moment. "It may be more trouble than it's worth trying to stop it. As of now, no one has gotten hurt and we have no proof that this is actually Kira or even an individual who has the same abilities as Kira. For now, our best bet may be to sit back and watch how the situation develops and what this person claiming to be Kira says they want."

"This isn't the first person who's come forward, claiming to be Kira." Soichiro stated, heavily. "They are the first to go this far, however." Most of the people in the room nodded, solemnly. They knew that to be true.

It had been frustrating for the police the first couple weeks after the live confrontation between Kira and L because a gaggle of nutcases came out in droves, claiming to be Kira. Whether they did this because they needed psychiatric help or because they just wanted the attention, Light didn't know. He supposed it didn't matter in the long

run and the claims tapered off as the excitement died down.

"Indeed." L said. "This is the first person claiming to be Kira who tried to take a news studio hostage. For that, I can be a little impressed by their audacity." Despite the fact that there was no inflection in his tone, Light couldn't help the surge of jealousy he felt at the comment. He immediately wrestled it down, reasoning to himself that envy was an ugly emotion and L was still the most interested in the real Kira.

L added one more thing. "However, this fact also makes them dangerous. Until we can predict what they might do next, it's important to act as if this person is just as much of a threat as Kira. To be on the safe side, we must apprehend and interrogate them as soon as we can do so safely."

The group waited quietly for a while until Ukita came back with the letter he'd taken from the station. While they were waiting, Watari came around and asked them all for their choices in midnight snack for the night and he managed to return with said snacks, placing each person's snack in front of them, before the officer returned.

Once Ukita was back, safely ensconced in the investigation room, the group sat in the center of the room in a circle and passed the letter around. The letter had already been encased in a plastic bag so that they could look at it without getting their DNA on it. Touta and Aizawa blinked in surprise after reading the contents, while L reread the letter while holding it by the corners with an unsurprised expression.

"So this person claiming to be Kira wants to meet with L." Soichiro stated, his words cutting through the heavy silence that had settled over the group after they'd all read the absurd demands the possible Kira imposter was making.

The television had been turned off shortly after Ukita got back with the letter. They'd managed to obtain it before it could be televised and the crooked manager of the studio had been heavily warned against trying to do so before Ukita left the studio. They wouldn't stop the broadcast, but that didn't mean they wanted Sakura TV's fear mongering to get even worse. And, as L explained to Ukita over the phone, it would only make things harder for them if such demands of L were to be televised where the public and government officials could hear of it.

Light could definitely agree with that. When Misa had demanded L appear on TV in the past timeline alongside threats if he didn't, governments and members of the police force were eager to throw the great detective under the bus.

"It's absurd! Where do they get off asking for something like that?!" Aizawa ground out through his teeth. For once, his anger wasn't directed at L.

"Of course!" Touta immediately backed him up, turning to the rest of the group. "If they do have the same abilities as Kira, it would be a death sentence for L to do that! Even if they don't and they're just a fan of Kira, they could be planning to assault Ryuzaki with a knife or a gun or something!"

Soichiro sat in quiet contemplation for a moment at the words of his subordinates. Then he turned to L. "Are you really thinking of going to meet this person?" He said such without very much emotion in his tone, keeping his thoughts carefully controlled. Light was familiar with that habit of his, it was when his dad was being a complete professional. The man disappearing behind the policeman.

"Hm…no, I can't say I am." L answered calmly, lowering the letter to place it carefully on the table. "I will have Watari take a look at this for fingerprints. In the meantime, I think it is important to discuss where we will go from here. I'm interested to know what you think we

should do, Light." L queried, suddenly dragging Light into the center of the issue.

You just can't stand to not try and pressure me, eh? Light huffed in his mind, but he only allowed himself to blink in apparent confusion on the outside. "Me?"

"Yes, I would be most interested to hear your thoughts on the matter." L said decisively, not once looking away from the letter on the table.

Light thought about it, what he wanted to say. It was obvious that L wanted it to appear to the group that he was asking because he respected Light's intelligence, but they both knew it was because he wanted to study Light's answer. To find something Kira-like about it… to use what Light says to augment his idea of how Kira acts…maybe a little of both…

Anyway, Light had his answer. "Well, you absolutely can't go yourself. It's just too dangerous. We don't know what this person is capable of yet since they haven't killed anyone that we know about, but they've made threats so we have to take that seriously."

Light idly took notice of the emphatic nods that his words gained from the officers in the room. After the moment's pause, he continued on. "But it also might present us with an opportunity that we can't afford to ignore. If our goal is to arrest them and determine if they're a threat, it would be the most dangerous, but also the quickest and most direct route of doing so. At any rate, it's clear they want *something* so they're unlikely to skip a meeting if we manage to set one up." These words caused most of the others to don thoughtful expressions.

"What would you suggest, Light?" His father asked.

Light gave him a small smile. “I think we should set up a meeting if we can figure out a way of doing it and have one of us pose as L. A number of us can also be at the scene, ready to apprehend or intervene if they make any threatening moves.”

“And you believe that to be the correct course of action?” L asked.

“I really do.” Light nodded. “We’ll need to handle the situation carefully, but it’s best not to let this opportunity get away from us. If we ignore this person, their behavior will only escalate and then someone could get hurt.”

“You do make a good point.” Aizawa stated.

“But what if they really are Kira?” Touta inserted, worriedly.

“Well, Kira apparently needs someone’s name to kill them. Their real name, not an assumed one or their correct name but misspelled, right?” Light had taken special care to make it appear as if he had those two limitations in this life, as well. The fact that he could now tell anyone’s name by looking at their face better served him as a secret.

“That’s correct.” L stated, now watching him intently.

“Then as long as the member of our group that meets this person still uses their fake ID, then it should be safe enough and the rest of us will be on standby. But I really don’t think this person is Kira. They haven’t done anything to *prove* it, no one’s died. Besides, the way this person is acting and the steps they’ve taken don’t match Kira at all. We’re probably dealing with a run-of-the-mill pretender.”

“Hmm…I agree with you on that.” L muttered. “And I agree that your response seems logical. We must take special precautions, though. It would be a shame if I were to be killed by some random person hopping on the Kira bandwagon.” L’s lips tugged into a frown, likely recalling the last time he had to deal with someone random pretending to be Kira.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Hideki.” Light said, grabbing L’s attention.

With a vague smile on his lips, Light raised his snack - an apple tart - to his lips, ready to take a bite.

“Kira will never kill you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to AuroraAstera for the idea about Light and Ryuk having a secret way of communicating!

So we see here Light’s mind flicking wildly between the past and the present during the reprise of the Second Kira debacle. Being in a stressful situation that so closely mirrors an event from the past would have its effect on anyone, Light included. Thankfully, he’d changed enough that it didn’t end with a body count…

Misa Amane and Raye Penbar

Chapter Summary

> We have Misa and The Return Of Raye Penber in the same chapter~ Let's goooooooo!

Chapter Notes

> I hope you know this chapter is 20 pages on Google Docs. This semester is just about to end! That means that hopefully my schedule should be less full, so I might have time for more writing. You all know what that means?! Less time between chapters!! Woooo!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light was starting to get on L's last nerve.

How was it that this boy *always* seemed to manage to know just the right things to say? How was it that he always managed to peak L's interest while at the same time appearing to be innocent to any bystanders? The boy was either incredibly lucky or ruthlessly intelligent. If L was an especially unlucky man, he might say it's both.

For a while now, L had found himself with the uncomfortable realization that his current position isn't what he would want it to be. L always did his research before agreeing to take a case and many were so outrageously simple that he didn't even see himself as having an opponent. The few times he had felt that he was at a disadvantage in one of his games, it hadn't lasted long. This was different. This was a prolonged - one might say, never-ending - feeling that he was caught wrong-footed.

While crime solving was a game for him, it was one he'd always played from an advantageous position. This was the first case - and the first criminal - that challenged L's superiority. Perhaps it was Kira's seemingly supernatural ability to kill effectively but for the first time, L wasn't standing atop a mountain, watching as his opponent

tried to scramble their way up to his level.

No, he was on lesser footing, if anything. It was a realization that took a little time for L to come to and he still seethed at admitting it to himself. L found meeting others on equal terms distasteful, he preferred to have the deck stacked in his favor always. This was humiliating. This was embarrassing. Kira was the first case in a long time that L had taken a special interest in, that had captivated him. So much so that he'd already gotten on the case before the world governments got desperate enough to ask him to come in.

And yet, even if that was the case, he had severely misjudged just how formidable of an opponent Kira was going to be. He imagined a battle of wills and of wits between two geniuses, who were both admittedly arrogant and bored by the world. L imagined an epic battle where L - despite not caring overly for morality and justice - would nonetheless stand for Good while Kira would stand for Evil. Not that the infamous killer would see themselves that way, of course…

That isn't what he got.

No, instead what L got was the runaround. Over and *over* again. The boy had seemingly made it his personal goal to confound L with everything he did and the detective would be *damned* if it wasn't intentional. He felt like he was starting to lose his grip on reality…or what reality *should be,* at any rate.

Nothing had gone the way he expected it to and while his predictions in the past had not always been accurate, almost *none* of the ones he'd made lately have been proven true. From the moment they first interacted, Kira had continued to baffle and evade L's machinations at nearly every turn. L expected Kira to rise to his taunting, because he expected Kira to be a prideful person with a savior complex or something of the sort. What else could you call someone who went on some sort of holy crusade by murdering a bunch of criminals? Some of which hadn't even had trials?

However, except for that first confrontation when he'd pretended to go on screen in front of Japan, Kira hadn't reacted to his challenges since.

Then, after Light Yagami had come onto his radar, he'd chosen to show himself to the boy in person, only to be surprised by the boy's reaction to him before and after he found out L's identity. He'd offered to let Light onto the team searching for Kira to test him, only to be soundly rejected. He'd continued to be rejected, despite his efforts, until Light had finally joined, only to meet with a smiling wall every time he tried to trip Light up in conversation while they were working.

It didn't help that Light had made it clear by this point that he had a crush - despite subsequently refusing to date him - and that everyone else on the team seemed to love him. They would probably defend Light's *honor* to the death, especially Soichiro Yagami, Naomi Misora, and Touta Matsuda.

Kira was basically rubbing his identity in L's face at this point. As L stared at Light's smile after he stated that Kira wouldn't kill him and Light stared back, he was absolutely certain of this fact.

~ 🅚 ~

It took them less than a day to find the probable identity of their Kira impersonator…because there were fingerprints all over the letter, but only from a single individual. There were no other fingerprints aside from that set. *They couldn't possibly have been that stupid,* L had thought but nonetheless, he had allowed Watari to run it through the police's fingerprint database.

There had been no one with a criminal record. *However* , there had been a match found on file and surprisingly, it wasn't found through the JPD database but as part of the US. Rather than a suspect to a crime, this individual's fingerprints were on file because they had been a witness to a crime and it had apparently been found necessary to distinguish their fingerprints from those of the suspect.

Why it was still on file when the case had been resolved months ago, L didn't know, but he suspected either someone carelessly forgot to delete the information or kept it due to an abundance of caution. Regardless, they had a match and it was so ridiculous that several members of the group almost demanded that it must be wrong.

One Misa Amane was the owner of the fingerprints, a famous model and burgeoning actress who had quickly become popular in the US and whose popularity had also infected Japan. Currently nineteen years old, she was the daughter of a Japanese man and an American woman and had joint citizenship in both countries. It seems she was born in Japan and spent her younger years there but her family moved to America when she was fourteen and that is both where she lived up until recently and where her modeling career started.

She had blonde hair and brown eyes and was 152 centimeters tall. She recently came to Japan and seems to be trying to expand her audience here. Very little of this information wasn't publicly available in some manner. L knew of her from teen magazines, but he looked into her much more when the fingerprints were tied back to her and so when he sat the rest of the investigators down to discuss their options, he was prepared.

"Surely, it must be a mistake!" Aizawa exclaimed, not for the first time, when the sit-down discussion began. L didn't care to look at him, playing around with a couple of strawberries sitting in a bowl on the table in front of him.

"It does seem really hard to believe." Matsuda interjected, hesitantly.

His eyes glanced around the group nervously.

“Criminals come from all backgrounds.” Soichiro gently reminded them. “However, I will admit I find it startling. A young model being directly involved in this.” He gestured at a picture of Misa Amane from a magazine that was placed on the table.

“Well, it’s not an everyday occurrence.” Light acknowledged, casually. “But you can’t judge a book by their cover. Besides, there’s no explainable reason why her fingerprints would be on the letter unless she had sent it.” He pointed out, bringing everyone back to the core of the issue.

“You’re right.” Naomi smiled at Light. “She hasn’t committed any serious crimes that we know of although if she was really the one who wrote and sent those letters, she is guilty of making criminal threats against those who work at Sakura TV. Regardless of if she wrote them, she absolutely had to have had a hand in sending it for her fingerprints to be on it.”

“Indeed.” L muttered, pressing a thumb to his lips. “To know if she wrote it, we would have to have a sample of her handwriting and have a handwriting analysis done. However, we can safely say that she’s involved in some way, even if some of you find it difficult to accept.”

“Do we have any ideas on why she might have done something like this?” Naomi asked, seriously.

“Hmm…well a detailed interrogation would be the best thing for determining her motives, but I can make some guesses based on the information we have?”

“What information?” Aizawa demanded, gesturing at the table. “A letter and some fingerprints? Is that supposed to tell us why a model of all people is apparently threatening news reporters and imitating Kira?!”

“Not that.” L dismissed calmly. “The last hour or so, Watari and I have been looking more deeply into Ms. Amane and while there was initially little that was suspicious about her besides her fingerprints, we have found some questionable information that may shed some light on the situation.” L glanced at Light obviously when he said that, but the young man didn’t react at all besides just looking blankly back at him.

“And what did you find?” Soichiro inquired, leaning forward.

“Ms. Amane lost her parents in a double homicide.” L said without preamble. “She was a witness to their murder and the man on trial for the killings was himself a victim of Kira. Or at least his death is attributed to Kira.” Almost every member of the group shifted uncomfortably at this information, the two notable exceptions being Light and Naomi. Light didn’t show any surprise beyond blinking a few times and Naomi was nodding calmly in agreement.

“I heard about that before I quit my job with the FBI.” Naomi said. “At the time, it was all over the news. A normal couple killed inside their own home, witnessed by their child. Especially when that child was found out to be an up-and-coming model.” She winced in sympathy.

I wonder what Light’s excuse is, L thought sardonically. The fact that the boy wasn’t surprised even though he hadn’t been in America at the time pricked at the back of L’s mind. It reeked of insider knowledge.

“So what you’re saying is she would have a motive to idolize Kira or at least their message.” Soichiro said.

“She has a preexisting connection to Kira.” L acknowledged, with a nod. "As well, she's currently residing in the Kanto region of Japan." L informed the group, this time surprising them all. "It is noteworthy that this is the area that she chose to move to."

These words were the ones that caused the biggest reaction from all present. Several members of the force jerked in surprise and there were many glances around at each other and murmured questions. Except, once again, Light. The youngest member of their group reacted with some surprise, but not nearly enough, L thought.

“Has she really moved here?” Soichiro asked, a deadly serious look on his face as he leaned forward.

L didn’t understand why the chief bothered to ask something like that, as if it would suddenly change his answer, but he got that a lot. He was used to having to repeat himself. “Yes. It seems she moved here directly once she came to Japan, which is troubling for her innocence. It is well-known these days that Kira is in the Kanto region of Japan, so while it could be coincidence, it could also be intentional on her part to relocate here.”

“It can hardly be a coincidence when her fingerprints are on a letter claiming to be Kira and threatening reporters.” Light deadpanned, re-bringing up their biggest piece of evidence that something strange was going on here.

“Oh, right…” Matsuda said with a troubled expression, looking down at the table.

“Indeed. I will admit, while we have gotten lucky to have these fingerprints that we can trace back to a culprit…I find it a little

troubling to think about, as well." L murmured.

"How so?" Soichiro asked, watching him.

L sighed. "I can't decide if this second person that we're dealing with is someone secretly clever who has some end-game they're working towards by leaving their fingerprints for us to find…or just a complete idiot who's never heard of wearing gloves when you're committing a crime. Or perhaps I just hope that they aren't a complete moron." He seethed quietly with annoyance.

"You think they might've done it on purpose?" Aizawa asked, leaning forward.

"Well, that makes sense." Light interceded, thoughtfully. "All of these antics seem like they want attention more than anything. Their threats turned out to be impotent, so maybe us getting the letter and identifying the fingerprints was part of the plan, all along. I mean, who forgets to wear gloves?"

"But why?" Aizawa questioned, in confusion. "Why on Earth would they want that? The only reason I could think of is if they wanted to frame Ms. Amane and why would they want *that?* "

"I agree, it doesn't make a great deal of sense." L acknowledged. "Unfortunately, all we can engage in at this point is wild speculation. I'm afraid we will have to ask Ms. Amane if we want a better look at her motives, if indeed she is the one who sent the letter."

The group was silent for a moment.

“So what should we do?” Matsuda asked with clear worry. Aizawa had a pinched expression on his face but he said nothing.

“Do you have a plan on how to approach Ms. Amane?” Naomi said.

L took his time answering. “The most direct way I can see…” He reached forward to grab a strawberry and popped it into his mouth. “Is to contact Ms. Amane via her phone pretending to be Kira and see if she takes the bait.”

“Her phone?” Matsuda repeated in surprise. He had quite the dumb expression on his face, in L’s opinion.

“Yes, that seems the most direct way to contact her and lure her out into the open.” L repeated himself.

“I think we would all benefit from an explanation of your thoughts on this matter.” Soichiro interjected.

L was willing to oblige. “We can surmise that she was the one who sent the letter, but we cannot verify whether she intentionally left her fingerprints for us to find or if it was accidental. Our first task isn’t to find out why she did it, but to figure out how we can get her to meet with us. Given that she pretended to be Kira and moved to this region of Japan, the most logical assumption moving forward is that she would respond to Kira.”

L glanced briefly at Light, but didn’t linger. “We don’t have Kira, but if she was indeed performing for Kira’s attention, she may not be particularly cautious if someone contacts her claiming to be Kira. She might actually be hoping for it. I can easily find Ms. Amane’s phone number so if we can take advantage of her possible lack of caution, then we might be successful in setting up a meeting with her.

Even if we used the proper channels, it is likely that she would be willing to meet with any of you if she knows that you are working with me and most people are nervous about being interviewed by the police. But if she believes that she is meeting with Kira, then that may be a different matter."

"But what if she is Kira, after all?" Matsuda inserted, sounding panicked. "Maybe she just didn't want to kill any of the reporters on live TV. Kira hasn't killed anyone innocent of any crimes yet. If she is, then it's not safe to meet with her! She'll be suspicious if someone claiming to be Kira contacts her if she is Kira and she might be willing to harm one of us if she knows we're working on the KIra case."

"It's highly unlikely that she is Kira." L said. "Even if she hadn't wanted to kill a reporter, she could have written the name of a criminal yet to die in the letter and then kill them during the broadcast to prove who she was. More importantly, there seems to have been no real purpose to the whole incident except to draw attention. That behavior differs wildly from Kira's behavior before this, which is one more assurance that they're different people."

L couldn't believe that Misa Amane - if she was the sole person behind this - was Kira. Even when he tried to entertain the idea simply to consider it, he couldn't fathom it. He had learned from his experience with Raye Penber's abduction that the unbelievable could occur, especially in this case. As unbelievable as he found it, that was why he tried to think through the situation where she may be Kira.

However, the behavior that this new "Kira" displayed and the Kira that L knew were just too disparate. L was disgusted by the idea that Ms. Amane might be Kira, especially when compared with Light, who was the only piece that fit into the puzzle that was Kira. He couldn't accept that Light wasn't Kira, but he found it even more unacceptable that Misa Amane was. It was practically a zero percent chance.

“Both of you are right.” Light said, thoughtfully. “I think it’s very unlikely that Ms. Amane is Kira, it just doesn’t match. She’s more likely to just be one of the many disturbed individuals that claim to be Kira with nothing to back it up, albeit she’s more determined than the ones you’ve probably had to deal with before. That or maybe she’s a Kira supporter who’s desperate to meet Kira.”

Light shrugged, as if to downplay the suggestion moments after making it. “But I also agree with Mr. Matsuda in that she could still be dangerous. I wouldn’t normally think about having mine or other people’s lives threatened by a young model, but considering what she was willing to do on TV earlier, she might actually be crazy. I don’t think any of us should go to meet her or at least not without precautions.” L noted the spike of annoyance he felt at Light backing Matsuda up, too.

“Precautions will of course be made.” L tried to assure them, but simultaneously wanted to make it clear that they were going to go through with contacting their suspect directly. “But each one of us knew that there would be a risk to our lives when we joined the Kira Investigation, myself included. At times like this, it’s the uncomfortable truth that risks must be taken to advance in the case.”

Various members of the group shifted uncomfortably at his proclamation, but none of them said another word against it. After a short stretch of silence, Soichiro cleared his throat and pushed forward in the conversation. “Well, then. I suppose we should look up her number and compose a message.”

“Please let Watari know to handle that.” L said, staring at the bowl of strawberries and picking up another. “Light and I will handle the composition. Please, I would like everyone else to start the plans on how to meet with her quickly and carefully. I will look over them later on.” Something in Mr. Yagami’s expression twitched sporadically, which L could only reasonably attribute to his bringing Light into the conversation. The man’s reactions to L interacting with his oldest child were unfortunate and annoying, but acting as if he didn’t notice them was the most efficient option.

“Alright, then. I suppose we better get started.” Soichiro declared, immediately standing up and beckoning the group, at large, to follow him to another table where they could have more space to work. L couldn’t reliably identify the emotion in the older man’s voice when he spoke, but the man looked possibly frustrated. Overprotective parents on the police force…

The rest of the group followed their chief diligently, although Matsuda looked worriedly at Light and Aizawa was glaring thunderously at L, as usual. They had so much respect for their chief and so rarely argued against his decisions. And so Light and L were left as the only ones sitting at the table…

I didn’t think this through, L concluded instantly. On one hand, Light may be more likely to become careless and slip up if they were alone, especially with Light’s… *feelings* …towards him. However, the uncomfortable other side was Light’s open affection towards him, which L simply didn’t know how to deal with.

If there was a singular thing that nothing in his life had prepared him for, it was processing the idea that someone liked him. People didn’t like L. Not platonically or romantically. The only one who had been constantly by his side was Watari and while the children at the orphanage where he grew up looked up to him, they were conditioned to be that way. They were raised to be his second coming, as it were. Of course they looked up to him, they were meant to be him. Someone like Light simply shouldn’t exist in the version of the world that L knew.

As if determined to limit the amount of time L had to think things through, Light barely waited a minute before he got up from his seat - which was originally directly across the table from him - and moved to a seat right by L. The detective reasoned to himself that being closer together made it easier to work when in a group of only two, but given Light’s attentiveness, L couldn’t help but take firm notice of the action.

“Is there something I can help you with, Hideki?” Light asked, hovering near his personal space bubble but not inside it. Brushing against his bubble.

“You would like to be helpful to me?” L checked, glancing at him.

“ *Yes.* ” Light replied, staring right back at him.

“Then why won’t you agree to pretend to be me and meet this fake Kira?” L inquired, somewhat irritated. The young man had refused to be the decoy L when L had asked him and once Light refused, his father had put his foot down about it.

“Because I don’t want to die if that person ends up actually being Kira.” Light nonetheless said this with the most cheerful expression and smile that L couldn’t help but think he didn’t mean it at all. “Or if they’re just crazy. Crazy works, too.”

“I assure you that I would let absolutely nothing happen to you.” L promised.

A ghost of a smile touched Light's lips as the brunette looked back at him. “Maybe not. It’s still a ‘no’, though. I have no interest in pretending to be Kira.”

“Even though you’re a fan of their work?” L pried.

“Even though.” Light nodded, wearing a pleased and completely unbothered expression.

“I understand.” L said, despite feeling irritated at Light’s obstinate refusal. “Could I nonetheless interest you in helping me with the encounter in another way?”

“What do you need?” Light asked, cocking his head to the side.

“Could you be responsible for texting Ms. Amane pretending to be Kira? I won’t ask you to meet with her. Of course, I will provide you with a phone that can’t be traced and I would like to check any message you compose before you send it, if you don’t mind.”

After all, L didn’t want to take the risk that Light might try to sneak a hidden message into the texts to Ms. Amane. If Misa Amane was a Kira supporter and Light is Kira, Light would have motive to try and warn her about the plan they’re making against her.

“I suppose I can do that.” Light nodded. “But can I ask why you want me to do it so bad?”

“It’s because of your support of Kira.” L said outright. He gave Light some consideration though and glanced lowered his voice so as not to draw the attention of the others in the room. “I believe that - as a Kira supporter - you will have a unique insight on how someone who supports Kira would think and act. If one of the other investigators takes the lead in this matter, I am afraid that their disdain for Kira might leak through their conversation, even over text message.”

Light got a peculiar look on his face, but L was certain he got the underlying implication in L’s request. *I know you’re Kira,* L was saying. *I know you’re Kira and I’m using this request to put pressure on you. I want you to talk like Kira to see if you’ll slip up somewhere and give yourself away.*

If Light understood the hidden motive, he didn't let it affect his manner, which was nothing less than L would have expected from him. It took Watari only a couple of minutes to get back to L with the number to Misa Amane's cell phone. From there, Light sketched out a starting text message on a piece of paper while L looked at what he was writing over his shoulder. Light had only been writing for a few minutes when he stopped, seemingly without reason.

"Is there something wrong, Light?" L inquired.

"Well, I could use a little help getting into the mindset." Light smiled shyly at L. L didn't buy it for a second.

"I would think you'd have no trouble getting into Kira's mindset." L said.

Light's only reaction was to keep smiling. "Just being a Kira supporter doesn't make me confident that I can think like Kira." Light dropped into silence for a moment. "What kind of person do *you* think Kira is?"

That question caught L off guard and he didn't know how to answer it.

"Come on, you've been studying him for a while, haven't you?" Light pushed when the seconds kept ticking by and L hadn't responded to him. "You must think something about what kind of person Kira is. There must be *something."*

This time after finishing, Light fell into silence with him and waited for L to answer. A task which was proving to be harder than L would've thought it would be. It wasn't the first time he'd been asked

about his evaluation of Kira, no. But it came after L had been forced to come to terms with how deeply flawed his initial evaluation of Kira had been. His beliefs regarding Kira's motivation and personality had changed, but were they wrong, as well?

And there was Light, watching him and waiting for his response when L came back from being lost in his thoughts. Light was waiting patiently but nonetheless noticeably for him. “I think…” The words came to L’s lips suddenly without effort as he stared back into Light’s eyes. “That Kira is someone determined. They are a cut above the regular criminal. Highly intelligent. He finds ways around anything. Scheming and manipulative and yet not self-righteous. No…Kira seems strangely grounded in their behaviors, they rarely act impulsively and they don’t react to taunting. They act more mature than I thought they would.”

Throughout his talk, Light barely reacted aside from blinking every so often. His expression was fixed in a relaxed smile with clear eyes and L - not for the first time - desperately wished for the privilege of knowing what was going on in his mind.

“Kira…” Were his eyes gold or brown? “...Is virtuous.” He recalled, this time without annoyance, when Light interfered in the argument between Aizawa and Matsuda and how he had defended the latter. “He doesn’t like any kind of wrongdoing, as he sees it. His morals are shady, but when he considers something wrong, he takes it upon himself to take a stand. He only kills criminals for the same reason.”

“And,” This part, L almost had to try not to speak. “Kira has a strong sense of empathy and understands others very well.” The two looked at each other.

“You don’t think Kira kills criminals because he feels superior to them?” Light broke the weighted silence between them in a quiet tone. His eyes glinted with a new emotion, something mischievous.

“Not anymore.” L offered reluctantly, the admission easier to make with the strange, charged atmosphere between them. “I don’t think Kira is as arrogant as I had first surmised.”

“Then why do you think he does it?” Light asked, cocking his head slightly. His amused smile rankled L.

“I need more data to be reasonably certain.” L said.

“But you can guess?” Light pressed without missing a beat.

L didn’t answer right away, but he also didn’t think as hard about his response as he usually did. No, the next words were almost entirely a product of his intuition. “I think Kira does it because he cares.”

Just for a moment, a fraction of a second, Light’s smile slipped ever so slightly. It was back to full form before most people would have noticed, but L was not most people. Bolstered by it, he progressed further. “Originally, I had thought that Kira hated criminals - maybe the victim of some past crime like Ms. Amane - and looked down on people with the godlike abilities they seem to possess. I find it frustrating, but I can no longer consider that accurate. Rather, Kira seems to care about people a great deal despite their dark abilities and that trait, in conjunction with Kira’s resistance to being goaded by the police, starts to make a lot more logical sense.”

“You’re really bothered by the fact that you can’t seem to get Kira to react to your teasing.” Light needled him.

L’s frowned slightly. “He isn’t exactly what I expected and that's been made clear by how difficult it is to prod him into action. Kira doesn’t

appear to be overly prideful."

"You mean like you?" Light raised his eyebrows as he shot back.

L bit his thumb at the response, irritation pooling in his gut before he dismissed it. "Like me." He acknowledged. "I have no problem admitting that I am prideful and hate to lose any game, no matter how small."

"But what you can't stand is when Kira doesn't act the same way." Light concluded.

"...That could be true." L said simply, not wishing to admit to any more.

"I'm surprised at you though, L. With what you think about Kira." Light turned away slightly, changing the subject as he did so.

"Are you disappointed that I don't think worse of Kira?" L asked, surprised.

Light huffed out a short laugh. "Not at all! It's just that the way you described Kira was strangely complimentary for someone fighting against him. Not only that, but you didn't sound very disgusted when you talked about Kira's righteousness. I remember not too long ago when you were talking about Kira's 'honorable' acts like they were a nuisance."

"It is something of a nuisance." L corrected.

“Because it’s harder to work against someone when they act morally or because he’s not acting the way you expect him to?” Light went right back to asking hard questions.

“Regardless,” L breezed past the inquiry without comment. “A criminal playing at morality is a joke more than anything respectable.”

Light looked back at him for a second before smiling in amusement again. “I don’t think that’s the real reason it annoys you.”

“And what do you believe is the real reason?” L prodded.

“I think there are several. You don’t like surprises, I think. You don’t like it when Kira acts unpredictably. Plus, Kira gains more public support when they act virtuously. But I think there’s also another reason why you don’t like it.”

“Pray tell.” L muttered, fixated.

“I think you don’t respect morality, in general.” Light stated.

The seconds ticked past as L came to terms with what Light had said. It wasn’t as if this were the first time Light made such allegations, but perhaps that made it more significant. Even if the first time, Light only mentioned it briefly and then moved on from it, Light has now brought the same idea up twice. That L wasn’t motivated by justice and that he didn’t respect morality are two sides of the same coin, to L’s mind. L found himself becoming curious about what Light truly thought of him now.

“Is that really what you think?” He probed.

“Yes, it is.” Light replied, unflinchingly. “I think you think of it all… honor…morality…as weaknesses. Things that hold people back from what needs to be done. It’s not that you don’t understand it, you just don’t care about it. I think that’s where most of the derision comes from when you talked about Kira’s honor before. It’s not *really* about Kira playing at morality or whatever, it’s about someone you think of as intelligent and cunning stooping to the level of holding back for moral reasons that you look down on. Because if the roles were reversed? You wouldn’t do the same.”

If Light Yagami isn’t Kira, then the entire universe has gone mad. L vaguely thought as he stared at Light in shock. This was far from the first time that Light had shown the preternatural ability to know L’s thoughts and feelings. No, that had been a recurring thing from the beginning, part of the reason why Light could startle L like he did. Even so, it occurred to him that this may be the first time someone besides Watari sounded as if they truly understood him.

“No…” L murmured as he looked at Light. “If the roles were reversed, I would do everything in my power to kill you.”

Impossibly, Light’s response to that declaration was to smile wider. “That’s part of what I like about you, Hideki. You’re tenacious and it gets you almost everything you want, but me?” He leaned just a fraction closer. “I’m determined too. I don’t want for a lot, but when I do want something…I don’t think even you could stop me.”

And then Light calmly pulled back, turned away from L, and started scribbling on his notebook again as if he hadn’t a care in the world.

“Thanks for dropping me off.” Light thanked Naomi as he got out of her rental car.

“It’s no problem, Light, but are you sure you don’t want to come?” Naomi asked with concern.

Naomi had agreed to drop him off at her and Raye’s rental apartment before she headed back to the hotel to do some last minute planning with the rest of the team. They were going to attend the meeting with Misa that they set up today. Misa had taken the bait when he’d texted her with the beginning message he and L had prepared. But then, of course she did. Anything she asked him, he was capable of answering easily. She was eager for her efforts to have caught her idol’s attention and Light had no problem sounding like Kira.

L had ravenously read whatever he wrote as his conversation with her drew on uncomfortably long, muttering suggestions every now and then about what he wanted Light to do. But for the most part, he just watched what Light did and said. He got her to agree to an in-person meeting after a little bit of back-and-forth, but it wasn’t really hard. She was a zealot just like before and it didn’t make her the best negotiator. The whole group - sans L - let out shouts of victory when Light told them that he’d managed to swing a meeting, but after that, Light refused to have anything to do with the plan. He’d done what he promised and that was all.

His dad was very happy about that, the man had clearly been nervous ever since the idea of Light acting as Kira during the meeting with Misa was brought up. He needn’t have been worried, Light had absolutely no intention to play along with L’s little game about having Light “pretend” to be Kira during the meetup. He wanted to put off seeing Misa again. His feelings towards her were hard to define, but it was some weird mixture of disgust, hatred, and guilt.

Whatever the case was, Light decided to make sure that there was no chance of L roping Light into his scheme in some roundabout way. The best way to do that was to make sure he was busy. Seemed like a good time to make good on that request of Naomi to go visit and check in on her husband.

"I'm sure." Light reassured her, closing the car door. "My father doesn't want me to be there in case she's dangerous and I don't have much interest in Misa Amane, anyway. I'd rather stay out of this one, if you don't mind."

"Well, as long as you're sure." Naomi's expression said she didn't understand, but she didn't argue further. "I called Raye and let him know you were coming over, so you can just knock on the door. Do you remember the room number?" Light nodded. "Alright then. Please call me if you need anything, I'll let you both know the results after the meeting."

Light smiled and waved as Noami drove off in her rental car before heading into the apartment building. The place was high-class…but of course it would be. Although he'd never seen it himself, Naomi told him that she and Raye had initially been renting a cheaper place that specialized in short-term rentals. It was being paid for by the FBI since Raye was there in the course of his work.

But things changed after the kidnapping episode. L had taken it upon himself to pay for them to relocate to a more secure, permanent rental. The man had money to burn on building a helipad, after all, and he certainly had enough reason to make sure they were somewhere safer. Raye had already been kidnapped once and Naomi was now an active member of the Kira Investigation. No one wanted one of them to be kidnapped again or worse.

Light put on his best "I belong here" strut with his hands in his jacket pockets and strolled straight through the lobby and directly to the elevator. Casually taking note of the numerous video cameras and the

security guards, Light pressed the button for the right floor and took the elevator up. When it opened again, he stepped out onto the brightly-lit, carpeted hallway and followed the numbered doors to the right one. Raye opened the door a few seconds after Light had knocked.

The man looked better than he had when they'd rescued him and that was the last time Light had seen him, but he also still looked a lot rougher than the first time he'd seen the man. Less put together, a little tired. The man didn't smile when he saw Light but his expression didn't look unpleasant either.

Now that Light thought about it, he wasn't sure if he had ever seen the man smile, in this life or in his first. Perhaps when the police had rescued him and he'd been reunited with Naomi. He tried hard for a moment but he couldn't recall.

"Oh, hello, Light. Naomi said you would be stopping by. Thank you for coming." His voice was equally rough and tired sounding but he still made an effort to be welcoming.

The agent stepped back to allow Light to come in before closing the door. "Please have a seat in the living room. Can I get you something to drink?" The man asked, already starting towards the kitchen.

"Some coffee would be nice." Light offered. He didn't actually want coffee, but he hoped the man would grab some for himself while he was making it. He definitely looked like he could use a dose of caffeine.

Light glanced around the tidy room until Raye came back and when he did, he indeed had two cups of coffee.

"Here's some sugar and cream if you want it. You're probably too young to have drank much coffee." Raye said as he placed the items on the low table between the couch and the chairs.

What's actually funny is that at this age in my first life, I drank my coffee black, Light mused to himself. Even as he thought that, his hands moved to the sugar and he just poured almost the entire contents of the sugar container into his coffee.

He noted Raye looking at him oddly as he stirred it together in his cup and brought it to his lips. It had been a long time since he'd taken his coffee black, though. When they'd started working together in the first timeline, L seemed to take it as an affront that Light should drink anything without sugar. What could he say? L wore him down. He's not sure exactly when he started adulterating his coffee the same way L did, but it became a habit.

"Uh…you must really like sugar." Raye offered, eyes wide at the amount of sugar he'd used.

"Sometimes I do." Light smiled faintly. What could he say? Sometimes people rub off on you. “How have you been feeling, Mr. Penber?”

“Raye. And I’ve been doing well, thank you.” Raye smiled faintly.

Light returned with a small smile of his own. “I’m glad you decided to stick around with your fiancé. I’m sorry that your first visit to our country started out like this. Coming here having to chase one criminal and getting kidnapped by another…I hope you don’t come away with a bad image of Japan. I promise we’re not as crime-riddled as we seem.” He gave his best political smile. The kind he always gave when he made small talk with someone he didn’t know very well. Light had never really had a sit-down talk with Raye Penber in the past.

Raye shook his head. “I don’t hold it against anyone except the people who did it. My visit hasn’t been during the best of circumstances, but I’m still thankful for the opportunity to come here.” The man winced as he spoke of the circumstances. Light barely had time to wonder about the cause before he got a clue.

“I originally brought Naomi with me so that I could meet her parents and ask them for their blessing on our future marriage.” The man admitted, his tone grimly mocking. Light cocked his head, it almost sounded like the man was blaming himself for what happened. How peculiar.

“I’m sorry.” Light apologized genuinely. “I can’t imagine how disappointing this must have been for you.”

Raye let out a dry laugh. “You have no idea. I came here worried about making a good impression on her parents so they would think I was worthy of their precious daughter…I was hoping to wrap up my work early on in the trip so I could dedicate the rest of my time to my fiancé and her family. Instead, I end up arguing with her, getting kidnapped, and no doubt worrying her incredibly.” He sighed deeply, his whole form slouching down towards the ground as he did so. “I still haven’t met her parents. She’s gone to see them a few times, but I’ve been resting up here. I wouldn’t be surprised if they never accept me after this.”

Something about the way the older man was talking made a flag fly up in Light’s mind. This time, Light couldn’t ignore it.

“…Raye…” Light started hesitantly, his eyes flicking to the side briefly before going back to focus on the man sitting in front of him. “…Do you, by any chance…blame *yourself* for your kidnapping?”

Misa was excited to finally meet Kira.

She could finally meet her hero! She had nothing but admiration for them and if she could only meet them *once* and tell them how much they'd done for her-!

She got close to the meeting spot and her body buzzed with excitement. *Finally!* Coming all the way to Japan wasn't a mistake, after all! Misa wasn't about to just storm into the situation unprepared, though. It wasn't that she was worried for her safety - she had nothing to worry about - but because of who Kira's second identity was, she didn't want to accidentally walk into a trap. She didn't know if they would come to her as her beloved Kira or as L and would need to keep up the act. She didn't want to get arrested!

She'd risk it to meet Kira though, because at least she knew that Kira wouldn't hurt her. Kira would never harm those who were pure of heart! He only punished the evil in the world and she wanted them to know she supported them. She would be the voice of the public who felt like they could only say what they truly thought online.

When Misa got near the meeting spot, instead of going there directly, she crept around the outer area and found a place to hide that gave her a view of the spot near the fountain, just as the text had said. She chose a spot far enough away that it would be hard to see her if someone was looking for someone hiding nearby. She was close enough to see someone slim and tall step into the area near the fountain and stand with their back towards her, looking at the fountain. She couldn't see them clearly though, not even enough to tell if they were a man or a woman. Misa pouted at that.

She waited for a few more minutes, looking around the surrounding

area and trying to see if anyone else was hiding like she was, maybe to ambush them. She couldn't see anyone else though and she was getting really antsy to meet them. She wanted to see if they really were Kira, so she took a deep breath to steel herself and crept out from her hiding spot. She started walking forwards.

As she got closer to the figure by the fountain, she could feel her heart start hammering excitedly in her chest. She put her hand to her heart, a grin spreading across her face as she came closer to the person who might be her idol until soon she was standing right behind them. There was only a few feet's distance between them now. She was surprised by it, but they didn't seem to notice she was there.

"...Um, hello?" She said, trying to get their attention. There was a pause and then the person slowly turned around.

Before her stood a woman older than herself but still young-looking, with dark hair and eyes. She wore dark pants and a shirt, making her comparatively pale face look ghostly. Well, she certainly fit the image of someone who could be Kira, Misa reasoned to herself.

"Yes? Can I help you?" She asked calmly. It was that calm that convinced Misa most that this woman was here to meet with her. She had to be! She would've been a lot more surprised about being called out to by a complete stranger, otherwise.

"Um, hi!" Misa greeted brightly after taking another deep breath.

She tried to look her most lovable.

~ ❶ ~

Naomi forcefully steadied her nerves, not allowing a bit of it to come across her face. She had thought that she would have to remind herself that the innocent looking young girl she was meeting could be dangerous, but it turned out not to be necessary. While Misa Amane truly didn't look frightening by anyone's imagination, the situation still felt stressful and her heart beating excitedly in her chest.

They were in a slightly removed area where they wouldn't be bothered by other people and there were hidden listening devices stashed around them (some by the fountain…some in the bushes…) that were going back to the headsets the rest of the team were wearing so they could listen in from a safer distance. They were still close enough to intervene if things took a dangerous turn.

She thought back to the advice Light had given her on how to act similar to Kira. He'd pulled her aside privately right before she'd dropped him off at her and Raye's rental apartment. He wanted to give her advice on meeting with Ms. Amane, to make the meeting smoother. When she'd asked him why, he made a startling admission…he liked to read magazines aimed at teen girls. And he had encountered more than one article on Misa Amane, so he thought he could give her some advice on the model's personality.

He said that she would be energetic and he suspected the best way to deal with her was to be calm and cold, so that she didn't fly off the handle emotionally. Stay away from strong terms or she might get carried away by implication and don't make any kind of verbal commitments or else she'll obsess over them. In other words, Light had told her that instead of pretending to be nice and trying to ingratiate herself with her, Naomi should hold herself apart and not engage enthusiastically with the suspect.

It was against what Naomi would normally think would be best with a subject matching Ms. Amane's specifications…but she trusted Light's insight. "Hello." She said coldly, making sure her eyes matched her tone.

A flash of concern entered Ms. Amane's eyes but before Naomi could worry about it, Ms. Amane hurried to speak. "Um…I'm sorry, but are you the person I was talking with?"

Naomi paused. Not because she was thinking about what she was going to say or if she was going to lie, it was a method that gave off a more calculating, controlled aura. She only let it stand for about three seconds before answering. "I am." She paused for a long moment, closing her eyes and drawing in a subtle breath. She was steeling herself before enacting the other piece of advice Light had given her, about what he wanted her to say. Then… "I am Kira."

There was a millisecond when Misa blinked in surprise and then she broke into a bright grin, her eyes practically glittering. "I knew it was you! I have been wanting to meet you for so long!! Ever since you punished my parent's killer, I've wanted to tell you how thankful I am!"

Carefully keeping her cool expression despite her surprise on how well that worked, Naomi asked, "Your parents?" As if she didn't know.

Misa nodded excitedly. "You executed the man who killed my parents! I don't expect you to remember everyone you saved, but to me, you're a hero. You stepped in and protected me when the police and the courts wouldn't! The System failed me, but you didn't!"

She looked up at Naomi like she hung the moon and it made Naomi feel vaguely uncomfortable. It wasn't just because she was pretending to be Kira. The joint factors of this girl's adulation - the almost slavish admiration that shone in her eyes - and the fact that it was directed towards Kira made Naomi eager for this confrontation to be over. Somehow, she hadn't expected this person to be so amazed at Kira and - as someone tasked with catching them - it was definitely uncomfortable.

“Is that why you pulled that stunt? Because you wanted to tell me that?” Naomi didn’t even need to try to sound unimpressed. It was such a childish thing to do.

For a moment, Misa looked worried. “I hope you’re not angry, I promise I wasn’t trying to cause you trouble! I just really wanted to meet you! I wanted desperately to tell you how much the work you do means to me and I know I speak for all of your followers when I say it! So many people have been saved by you or gotten justice! We know you fight for us…”

This was some unholy cross between religious fanaticism and delusion, Naomi decided. She could almost feel her skin crawl, which is not something she would ordinarily associate with a cute and bubbly young model.

“But you know, I didn’t expect L to be a woman.” Misa said lightly, a curious expression on her face.

Hold on. “L?” Naomi found the moniker slipping out of her mouth, almost as if she was in shock.

“Well, of course! You’re L!” Misa smiled, seemingly not picking up on her alarm.

“I’m Kira.” She repeated her earlier assertion as if Misa had somehow forgotten that, brows furrowing in deep confusion.

“Yeah and you’re also L! You have to be.” Misa was still smiling, but it was a little less exuberant than before. Maybe a little sly. “You don’t need to deny it, I already know! And don’t be worried if you are, I won’t tell anyone your secret!” She promised easily.

“Why would you think that I’m L?” Naomi knew that her act of cold indifference had completely deteriorated by this point, but she couldn’t find it within herself to repair it. She was consumed by confusion over the way this whole encounter was starting to go. She resisted the urge to look towards one of her team member’s hiding spots to see what they were thinking about the turn this had taken. This wasn’t part of the plan.

“Because I know that L is Kira!” Misa declared excitedly, causing the previously quiet surroundings to go practically mute.

For a time, it was as if nature in that area and every human being in it went quiet. Cold. It was a moment that was dominated by confusion and disbelief hanging in the air, an experience that Naomi shared with the handful of men that were hiding out of sight, watching and listening to the encounter nearby.

Almost in unison, they could all imagine they heard the sound of a record screeching to a stop.

Chapter End Notes

> I was smirking when I wrote Naomi saying the words “I am Kira” and on Light’s advice, no less. Thinking about that scene in canon where he said that to her after he’d got her name. I love the parallel.
>
> Also: Near will drop in t-minus three chapters!! Who’s excited?!

Shades of Raye

Chapter Summary

> The majority of this chapter is dedicated to Light's talk with Raye and I'm not in the least sorry about it!

Chapter Notes

> …and I'm not apologizing for the title.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raye, for the longest time, said nothing. At first, he stared at Light with eyes wide in shock, but then his gaze drifted away and his expression returned to being incredibly tired.

"Raye?" Light prodded gently when the man wouldn't answer him. He wasn't going to let this one go, that was for sure.

"I…" Raye started to say something but then cut himself off. "Look, you're a smart kid, but these kinds of adult matters might be a bit much for someone of your age. You've only just started college, haven't you? You don't need to be hearing about all this."

If Light didn't know any better, he would've sworn he detected the faint sound of a defense mechanism being engaged.

"I'm really not that young." Light pointed out. "And I don't think these things are so far past what I've dealt with before. Whatever you have to say won't go over my head, I promise."

Raye looked at him for a moment before sighing and rubbing a hand over his eyes. "Sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I wasn't trying to treat you like a little kid or anything…it's just not something you should have to be dealing with at your age." He did genuinely

sound apologetic.

“I know.” Light accepted the apology. “But now I’m concerned about it. You can’t possibly think that any of what happened was your fault, right?”

Raye’s eyes gazed off towards a fixed point somewhere over Light’s shoulder. “I…I know that the individuals who broke the law carry more responsibility, but…” He gained a frustrated look on his face. “It should’ve never happened.”

“Are you saying that because no one should ever be the victim of a crime…or because you feel you should have done something to prevent it?” Light cocked his head to the side, gaze never leaving the exhausted - depressed - man in front of him.

Raye looked shocked at his question. “Well, I mean, both are true…”

“But it’s the second one that you feel most strongly right now, isn’t it?” Light pushed, sadly.

Raye drew in a deep breath before answering. “I’m not just the victim of a crime, it’s not that simple for me. I’m a grown man and a trained FBI agent. I’m supposed to be better than that. I let my guard down. If I hadn’t, then all of this wouldn’t have happened. I could have prevented everything.”

“People can’t live their whole lives with their guards constantly up, no matter how well-trained they are.” Light said.

“I was on a case, I have to have my guard up at all times.” Raye

rebuked.

“But this wasn’t related to the Kira Case, was it? It happened at the same time, but it was completely unrelated, right?” Light asserted.

“That doesn’t matter.” Raye rubbed his forehead harshly. “I’m supposed to be a grown adult and an FBI agent. I should have been able to handle a couple thugs before it ever got to the point of kidnapping. The fact that it got taken as far as it did is embarrassing.”

“The world is a dangerous place, it’s hardly your fault for not being able to handle every wrong thing that happens to you.” Light insisted. “And it’s not your responsibility. It’s the responsibility of other people to not do harmful things to others, it’s not the responsibility of the victim to deal with it.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call me that. It makes me feel even more sad and pathetic.” Raye groaned.

What, “victim”? Light wondered to himself, perplexed. “I won’t call you that if it really bothers you that much, but it is technically what you are.” He ventured, trying to understand the man before him.

“People like me aren’t supposed to be victims, we’re supposed to be the type protecting others.” Raye said, frustrated.

“You mean FBI agents? But people don’t work that way, Raye. People don’t just live their lives in one category. My father taught me that anyone can be a victim of a violent crime, no matter their race, gender, ethnicity, economic status, or anything else. There are definitely people who are the targets of more violent crime than others, but…no one is immune. It’s a matter of precaution, but it’s also a matter of luck.” Light said, thinking back to the stories his father

used to tell Light when he got a little older and started begging his dad to tell him some stories about his work. The man had never gone into gruesome detail, but he had felt it was important to teach his children on how to be cautious as they grew up.

Raye didn't look like he knew how to argue with that, glaring at the floor instead. "...You wouldn't blame Naomi if it happened to her, right?" He prodded gently, staring at the man in sympathy.

"That's different!! I'm the man, I'm supposed to be strong!" Raye burst out, his expression tortured.

Ah…I know what this is, Light thought. That made sense of why Raye was so depressed. Light hadn't thought the kidnappers had treated Raye too badly so while kidnapping was *not* something to be underestimated in the degree that it could impact someone, Light had been surprised by just how badly the event had been on Raye mentally, but this made sense. It wasn't the kidnapping torturing Raye…it was Raye torturing himself.

Toxic Masculinity.

Light had been familiar with it for a long time, but it was only in his second life in the Shinigami Realm, watching humans operate, that he was able to put a name to the phenomena. It varied according to time period, country, and life circumstances. However, it was widely recognized that men in general were expected to act a certain way and so were women.

The memory of a conversation he had with Naomi when they first met niggled in the back of Light's brain. It was when she'd said that she'd quit her job because they wanted to start a family. Light hadn't understood why and she'd never actually explained. Light hadn't, until this moment, stopped being confused by the reasoning. Now he

thought he got it.

He didn't know anything really about Raye's past - the man had been there and gone in the blink of an eye, as if he'd never been at all. Yet, for the first time, Light thought he completely saw the man. Whatever life Raye had had, it felt clear that he'd been brainwashed to believe that he *needed* to act a certain way to be a good man.

Light could see it now if he closed his eyes and thought. A man protects his partner. He's the pillar that holds the family up. He's protective, strong, unyielding, *emotionless.* He doesn't fail and he doesn't feel pain.

Living in Japan, it wasn't as if this was the first time Light came across those ideas. No, instead it was more like…

Light thought he might see an echo of his own father in the man. The two were different, that was true. His dad had strong ideas about what kinds of lives he wanted his children to live, but he mostly left all the major decision making to their mom. He didn't really interfere on a daily basis and when there were disagreements in the past, he couldn't remember a time when his dad hadn't chosen to listen to his wife over himself. Soichiro had allowed his family to see his weak side. He showed it when he was tired or stressed and Light suspected he especially allowed his wife to see his weaker side.

His own mom hadn't been a career woman, she didn't look for excitement, and she was the shy and quiet sort, Light supposed. That was probably part of the reason his parents worked so well together. His mom probably wouldn't have liked an energetic man and his dad was definitely the same. His parents were the kind of people who wanted a calm and relaxing home atmosphere, so they probably had a lot of the same lifestyle goals. It wasn't like Naomi's situation where she had a whole other life and it didn't seem like she and Raye had really agreed on what kind of home lives they wanted.

And yet, as Light took in the older man's exhausted expression and heard him talk, he thought he saw just a glimmer of his father there. An exhausted man trying his best to provide for and protect the ones he loves, who takes it all on himself and then takes it to heart when he fails to carry the load forever.

Maybe that was why…

"You know."

…Light could help but reach out.

"Before being a man - before anything else - you're a human being." Light's mouth felt dry as he spoke, Raye's jerk of surprise making Light aware of just how long the silence had stretched between them. "A person. No one person can carry the load of multiple people forever…and no one has the responsibility to try."

Raye lifted his head to look at Light. His gaze was blank at first, like he wasn't hearing what Light was trying to say. But then his eyes seemed to come back to life a little and he looked at Light with shock. "What?" He didn't seem capable of saying anything else at the moment.

Light smiled sadly. That was what made things like societal expectations and gender roles so corrosive, they affected both men and women and everyone suffered for it.

Naomi was allowed to display as much emotion as she wanted and be an active part of her children's lives but was deprived of control over her own life and pressured to go along with others. Raye got the

control and the prestige of being the man of the household and the provider, but couldn't feel allowed to express emotions or weakness or be an active part in his children's lives because he was meant to be the authoritarian.

In this case, Naomi was pressured into giving up on a career she seemed to be made for in order to fit in with the role expected of her as a wife and future mother. And Raye, he had the burden of the sole breadwinner and financial supporter put on him and when going through a terrible experience, he blamed himself for not being stronger as the man and didn't know how to let others help him deal with those feelings. It was a terrible double standard on both ends.

It was a situation where no one benefitted and they both got hurt. Ultimately, it was a situation with no winner.

Raye bears responsibility if he did pressure her into making a decision she wasn't comfortable with, he should have paid more attention to his partner and not assumed that his solution was the best one. He needs to learn to listen actively to others. But there was clearly this ideological strangle-hold on him that - in Light's opinion - made him unable to see what was right in front of him…whether it was Naomi's unhappiness or his innocence in his own kidnapping.

It was the kind of thing that made Light sad and angry at the same time. This is what human society could do to people. People bear responsibility for their actions because they all had "free will", but what use was free will when people were twisted and warped by their experiences and their societies? Light sometimes wondered about that, but he could never come up with an answer. Maybe there wasn't one. One thing he did know from personal experience was that it took a lot of time and effort to untangle yourself from things like that and the person you are until you're freed from it…in a lot of ways, you don't know who you are.

Who was I back then? If I had to separate myself from my society and my

role…could I have done it or would Light Yagami have ceased to exist at all? Light gazed off somewhere else for a moment. Then he was back and he knew why he wanted to reach out to Raye. *Maybe if someone had been able to reach me back then…* It never helped anything to play games of "what ifs", but maybe this time really could be different.

"It's like I said," Light's voice was airy, almost wistful, to his own ears. "Before a man, you're a human being. You have the limitations of one and since when were men supposed to be omnipotent, divine beings, anyway?"

"That's not what I meant. You don't understand." Raye sighed, looking away.

"You're right, I don't understand." Light agreed easily, causing Raye's gaze to shoot back to him. "So help me. Why do you have to be held to higher standards than your fiance? Why does being an FBI agent or a man mean that it's your fault if you're the victim of a crime. Help me to understand what you're thinking, Raye."

Raye was looking at him with wide eyes. It was as if Light was some strange creature he'd never seen before and he didn't know how to categorize it.

"Raye?" Light prodded, gently.

Raye jolted and shook himself out of it. "It's…it's because I have to be strong. To take care of Naomi, protect her…"

"Naomi doesn't want to be protected." Light corrected. "She doesn't want to hide behind you while you protect her from the world."

“How do you know that?” Raye asked, disbelieving. “No offense, but I’ve known my fiance much longer than you have.”

“Because that’s not the kind of person she is.” Light said, gazing off into another life. “She’s made of strong stuff, your fiance. I’ll bet she could wage a war all on her own if she needed to. Made of pure steel, that woman is.”

Raye fell into silence, his expression contemplative.

“If I may say,” Light continued gently. “She’s a wonderful person to be with, there aren’t many people as strong and determined as her. Your likes and dislikes are your own affair, but I think you should appreciate that side of her instead of ignoring it, pretending it doesn’t exist.” He kept his tone gentle as he said this, careful to keep himself from sounding reproaching. He didn’t want Raye to put his emotional walls back up or they wouldn’t get anywhere.

“I’m not ignoring that!” Raye insisted immediately, leaning forward. “That was one of the things that first got my attention about her when we met! She was one of the only female FBI agents we had and yet not only was she high-performing, but she handled the stresses of the job better than most people.”

“And yet you asked her to quit?” Light cocked his head to the side.

Raye looked more annoyed. “We *agreed* on it. Once we got engaged, we agreed that one of us needed to stop working when we transitioned to a new lifestyle. Naomi and I were both working because we were single, but when you combine two people into one household, they can’t act the same as they would if they were still single. Lifestyle changes have to be made, especially since we want to have children. It doesn’t make sense for both of us to be working. I can make enough money for both of us and it benefits the family unit

to have the mother stay home with the children."

"Is that how you remember it? That you two agreed?" Light thought about that for a moment as part of their confusing relationship dynamic slid into place. He wouldn't be surprised if Raye really did remember it that way even if it isn't how Naomi remembered it, the man may not have realized exactly how upset she felt about it. He didn't seem particularly connected in terms of reading other people's emotions and Naomi was a very calm and composed person, not prone to throwing fits. "In other words, you wanted her to make a decision that was good for your 'family unit' as a whole, rather than one that was good for her?"

"That isn't what I meant." Raye insisted, heatedly.

"But that's what you said." Light shut him down instantly, his tone firm.

Raye seemed to have gotten the wind taken out of his sails. After a short stretch of silence, "I suppose that's the way I was thinking of it, but I didn't…" He drew off.

"But you didn't *really* think about it, right?" Light smiled slightly. "You were thinking of it unconsciously like that but you hadn't really had a sit down talk with yourself over it. Weren't asking yourself *why* you felt like that decision was better."

"Yeah…yeah…that sounds about right…I…" Raye drew in a breath. "It's what's best for us, but it sounds cold and heartless when you say it like that."

"Is that how it sounds to you? Cold and heartless?" Light relentlessly turned it back on him, but there was a reason for it. Ultimately, this

wasn't about him, it was about Raye and Naomi.

"I…of course it does. It sounds like I'm disregarding Naomi, but I'm not. I'm thinking of us." Raye replied, fumbling.

"I believe that." Light said, causing Raye to drop into shock again. "Well, I do. I can't say I agree with your conclusion, but I do genuinely believe that you are trying to think about what's best for the both of you - and your future children - I just think you missed the mark. I definitely don't think you came to this conclusion because you don't care." Raye didn't respond. "So please, tell me why you think this decision is what's best for the both of you, not just your children."

Raye didn't respond immediately. "Our jobs are stressful and time-consuming. I can't see how a marriage between two FBI agents would work, even without kids. We'd be stressed and exhausted all the time, probably rarely seeing each other. On my end, it sounds nice…being able to come home from a stressful and tiring day of work to a loving wife, a clean home, and a warm meal. Seeing our kids together, happy and healthy…and on her end, she can leave the stressful job behind. In a way, I'm almost jealous of her being able to leave the job, at least in my worst moments. We've all been there when things are tough though I suppose, wondering briefly why you put up with the job…"

"You feel like you were protecting her from the stress." Light nodded, somewhat understanding what he was thinking. Still, he felt the need to say something else. "But Raye, she never said she didn't like her job, did she? If she didn't, then she probably doesn't need you to protect her from her own choices."

Raye shook his head. "I know she'd be happier staying at home as a wife and mother-"

Light cut him off. “That’s not your decision to make.” He may have sounded harsh when she said it because Raye looked at him in shock again.

Light let out a breath and continued, a little less forceful this time. “You’re her husband, not her father. Even if you were, she’s a grown adult. What she wants and what makes her happiest is her decision, not yours or anyone else’s. I’m not going to tell you how your family unit should be, but in return, don’t tell me there’s only one right way to raise a family. Because there isn’t. There’s a myriad of good ways to be married and to raise children and they’re all different. What matters is what works for the both of you. I don’t think the definition of making a decision together is one partner telling another what’s best for them. That’s not loving, that’s controlling.”

“I…I…” Raye struggled for a response and this time, Light decided to wait for him. Raye floundered for a little longer before he visibly deflated. “Did Naomi say she felt that way?” He sounded upset, tired, and guilty.

“Maybe Naomi would end up being happier as a stay-at-home mother or maybe she would feel confined and controlled, like she’s given up her life and carry regret with her for the rest of her days. The second event isn’t a sure thing, but from what I’ve seen so far, it’s where she’d headed. She didn’t say that specifically and you should really talk about it openly with her.” Light hedged. “But she did say something to the effect that she regretted quitting her job and that she missed it. She looked really unhappy to me.”

If possible, Raye deflated even further. “I didn’t mean for it to turn out like this, I really didn’t. I only wanted to make her happy and be a good husband. I wanted us *both* to be happy. I wasn’t trying to be controlling, I love her.”

“I know you love her.” And Light meant it completely. He saw it in their interactions. The way they held each other. The way Raye had looked at her when they’d seen each other again after he was rescued,

like he was just happy to see her okay despite being the one who was kidnapped. It must have tortured him not knowing what was happening with her while he was gone.

Light remembered guiltily when he'd killed Raye in the past, how the man had begged for his fiance's life and agreed to do whatever Light told him to do if he would leave her alone. Which he, ultimately, didn't do.

Light hadn't known who Raye was protecting at the time since he'd just vaguely made threats hoping the man would have someone close to him and he had taken the bait. It wasn't until he met Naomi and heard her story that he realized Raye had a fiance and that was who he was protecting when he pleaded with Light not to hurt "her". Anyone who would willingly do the bidding of a killer and risk their life just to protect someone else must really care for them, whatever problems they had between them.

"I do believe you really love her, Raye, and I know she loves you. She was so scared for you when you were kidnapped, did you know that? She was afraid to lose you." Light considered something and then spoke again. "I really think it's a shame how things are with you guys right now, because it's clear how much you truly care about each other. I think the both of you deserve better than this, but you know what that means?"

Raye shook his head, tiredly.

"It means you can do better." Light gave a radiant smile and Raye looked at him. It took a few seconds but Raye began to look cheered at the announcement and Light smiled even brighter when he saw it start to happen. "How things are isn't how they need to stay. You guys just need to work on it together." Light pressed on.

Raye sucked in a deep breath and it was as if his whole body inflated with it. “You’re right.” Raye nodded, as if to encourage himself. “We can make it better.”

“You can.” Light encouraged with a smile. “You just need to talk things out without one person talking over the other. If you can make peace with the fact that you’ll have to hear things that are unpleasant and make concessions, then you can do it. I don’t have a lot of experience in that area, but I know that that’s normal in relationships. You both need to be open and honest about what you both are and aren’t willing to concede on and listen to each other. It’ll be hard, but you're used to overcoming difficulties as an FBI agent, aren’t you? Both of you are.”

A little bit of Raye’s color had come back, he looked less pale. “You’re right. We’re both strong enough to overcome this. We can do this.” It was enough to make Light want to smile harder.

He still thought that Raye should get some therapy for his hangups on men’s roles and the toxic mindset that he always needs to be strong, but Light didn’t think that this was the right time to push for that. Some people had adverse reactions to being told to get help, which is usually attributable to their childhood households or their society. When they hear “therapy”, they feel like they’re being told that there’s something wrong with them or that they’re crazy and instead of getting help, they seek to prove that they don’t need it. To prove that they aren’t damaged.

Maybe I can talk with Naomi about broaching the subject with him later, Light thought to himself. If they could successfully talk things out, then maybe that could come after. Raye might be less defensive about it after they get a win in the form of working things out. He might be able to ride that high past whatever insecurities regarding emotional vulnerability that his life might have given him.

Being an FBI agent couldn’t have helped in that regard, Light considered. It was definitely one of those jobs that was similar to the

military in that they were typically “masculine” jobs that pressured people to suppress their emotions and act like pieces of rock shaped like humans. If someone didn’t have a kind boss who understood the pressures that they were experiencing, then the only way to work up the ranks was to suppress everything and put on a brave face, no matter what. Light had worked with enough government agencies in the past to catch a general trend.

He hoped he could undo some of the conditioning, because it was clearly hurting the both of them and they deserved better. They were *capable* of better and he really hoped they made it. And he would do his best to help them through it even if they don’t ask him to. He had come to like the both of them and it was the least he could do to make up for what he had done to the both of them in his past life. He’d spared their lives, but now he wanted them to truly *live* .

~ ❶ ~

L had just enough time to ponder on whether he had made a grievous mistake. At the moment, he wasn't precisely sure where he'd miscalculated. He would have to think back over everything later and decide where it was then, but for now, all he could do was wonder - half in shock - how it all went so horribly downhill.

How his control over the situation deteriorated so completely.

He almost felt the instinctual need to blame it on Light somehow, too used to the young man throwing his plans into chaos. Yet, Light wasn't there during the meeting and all of his actions during the planning stage had been meticulously supervised by both L and Watari. He would dedicate as much time as was needed later in order to figure out how this was Light’s fault.

At first, the conversation between Ms. Misora and Ms. Amane went

predictably. It was just as he'd surmised and it appeared that the young model was a fan of Kira and that it was due to her parent's murder. While he had held that there may have been a deeper plan on her part and that she was secretly intelligent, it appeared the longer they talked that that wasn't the case.

Ms. Amane seemed to be somewhat reckless and had no qualms about admitting to what she had done and why she did it. Ms. Misora's next job had been to gather some additional evidence to go alongside the fingerprints and confession so they could arrest Ms. Amane. After all, he predicted that it would cause quite a stir if they arrested an up-and-coming young model without a wealth of evidence to support it. L supposed her foolishness was a boon, since she was giving them plenty to work with on that front.

…But as was so often the case these days, that's when things took a turn for the bizarre.

"Because I know that L is Kira!"

…..What?

L had frozen, a spoonful of the matcha ice cream he'd been eating froze in the air halfway to his mouth as he stared into space. While most of the group was on the ground and listening in through headsets, a few of them - including L and Watari - were hanging back in the hotel room and listening remotely. It had been a decision made for his own safety, since there was no justifiable reason for him to be where Ms. Amane was.

No, it was best for him to keep a distance, especially since she has now admitted to being a strong supporter of Kira. She likely wanted L dead since he was trying to catch Kira. L was a massive obstruction to Kira's goals and was therefore better off dead, something the real Kira

doesn't seem to understand. However, it appeared that no one on Kira's side was observing logic any longer.

She believes that I'm Kira? L thought in shock, his hand nearly shaking as he held the ice cream spoon. His mind whirled with the possibilities and the new gravity of the situation. *I don't understand this at all. Why does she think that I'm Kira? It doesn't make any sense.*

The whole area had multiple listening devices and one camera from which L could see the general positions of the two women, although the vision was highly limited.

Belatedly, L's hand shot out and pressed the button on the microphone he had set up. He'd had it prepared and set up to the comm set that Ms. Misora was wearing just in case. It was easy to expect that Ms. Amane might say something interesting on the spot that he would want to pursue questioning and so he'd wanted the option to give her directions in the moment should he find it necessary. He didn't think it would be used like this.

"Ask her why she believes that." L ordered breathlessly into the mic.

Ms. Misora must have heard him, but she was just standing rigidly still with shocked eyes. She had been just staring at Ms. Amane since the young woman's proclamation.

"Ms. Misora." L said again, more firm this time and Naomi jerked violently.

Mercifully, L didn't need to repeat the question once Naomi was back to her senses. "Ms. Amane, why do you believe L is Kira?" She asked, sounding as breathless and shocked as L himself did. At least L wasn't the only one who was suddenly at a loss with how to handle the

situation.

Ms. Amane's voice carried clearly through the high-tech equipment that L had spared no expense on. "You don't have to keep it a secret from me! I know you probably don't want anyone knowing about it, but you don't have to worry! I won't tell anyone, trust me!"

"Please, Ms. Amane," Naomi said, sounding slightly stressed. "Can you please tell me why you think this?"

"Of course!" Misa responded. L couldn't see her well, but she sounded quite chipper. Considering the chaos she'd just plunged his plan into, he found it grating. "It was actually a really popular theory online, but I don't think anyone besides me took it too seriously, so you're safe."

"...online?" Ms. Misora murmured to herself, barely audible. Misa heard it.

"A few people have talked about it!" She announced, brightly. "And it makes so much sense! Kira couldn't kill L on TV because Kira is L! And why else would L have made such a public spectacle if it wasn't to spread the word of Kira? It proved to the world that Kira exists and made sure that everyone knew it! Why else would any of that have happened?"

Misa was visibly excited as she explained her thoughts, her eyes sparkling as she looked up at Ms. Misora. "Kira obviously has more to gain if she's more publicized! And it would explain why L hasn't been killed by Kira yet but also why she hasn't *caught* Kira yet! People like to talk about how L and Kira must be so evenly matched, but really what are the chances of *that?* It makes much more sense if L is Kira, doesn't it? L made Kira famous!"

Hearing that statement was almost physically painful for L.

L made Kira famous.

The claim rang in his ear like an indictment. Is that really what he'd done? He supposed…he supposed it was, now that he thought about it, but he hadn't been thinking about it in those terms. Instead, he'd thought about it as proving Kira's existence so that they could be hunted. Demystifying the killer that the world governments couldn't even agree existed and most thought was a large group rather than an individual.

And yet, to this woman's mind, he'd made Kira famous. Brought them into the public eye, proved their existence, and proved they had some kind of supernatural powers. Because how else could Kira kill someone on the spur of the moment, without any prior research or publicly available records, knowing nothing about where they were and only knowing their name and face? And L personally knew that Tailor hadn't eaten or drank anything prior to his appearance on TV, so no chance of poisoning from those. That was the first proof that Kira's ability to kill was something unnatural, but it wasn't the last.

For the very first time, L wondered if he had been wrong to prove that on live TV. At the time, he had decided that it was the most efficient way to prove his point and get the ICPO's full cooperation in the matter, but now he wondered if it hadn't ended up being more of a double-edged sword. Kira not only became a godlike being in people's eyes and Kira had still taken the opportunity to prove he knew things he shouldn't know.

After ruminating on that, L's mind switched to the more pressing problem that he was now faced with. Misa Amane had thrown a molotov cocktail into his investigation and he could imagine only too easily what the wreckage would look like.

In his mind's eye, he could see the officers of the Homicide Unit tossing out the odd accusation that L might be Kira and the more common accusation that he was untrustworthy. Even after the team had gotten pared down, Aizawa's antagonism towards him had been constant and then there was the other investigator who quit the group right before their first meeting. He could not only foresee a return of those suspicions - it was inevitable, really - but also a worsening of them.

Even though Misa Amane had no evidence - she had *nothing* - she was a suspect in the case and now she had named him as Kira. L knew what that meant, the rest of the team would start looking at him with real suspicion now. At certain points, they had only followed his orders when Chief Yagami interceded on his behalf, which the man was far less inclined to do when his son was brought into the picture.

They were all annoyingly emotional. Aizawa, in particular, ran entirely on emotional fuel and his fuel of choice tended to be hatred of L himself. The man wasn't unique in disliking L's methods, many people in the police force didn't, but he was by far one of the most uncontrolled individuals L had encountered in close proximity.

But L was certain that Aizawa's feelings towards him extended past simple professional dislike. The man had made it clear early on that he didn't trust him and L was certain that was still true. He did not look forward to what his reaction would be to this new development in the case.

~ ❶ ~

"Care to explain?" Aizawa demanded, once they were all back at their headquarters.

They were back in the hotel room serving as their base. L had recalled

them all very quickly after the disturbing claim that Ms. Amane had made. He'd managed to not make it appear too abrupt to their suspect and Ms. Misora was very good at making excuses. She managed to assure a concerned Amane that she would contact her again for another meeting soon.

Unfortunately, as soon as Ms. Misora came back and returned the tech she'd been using, she'd asked for permission to leave to go pick up Light. L had let her go and reluctantly sat down for an undesirable talk with the rest of the group.

"I don't believe I have anything to explain." L replied calmly, sipping from his tea. If anything, his blasé response enraged the other man further.

"What do you *mean* you 'don't have anything to explain'?! Of course you do! *Why* does Misa Amane, the person who we've definitively linked to the Sakura TV Incident, believe that you're Kira?" The man demanded, shoving up from his seat and slamming his hands on the table.

"We all heard her explanation of her beliefs earlier." L bypassed the obvious answer. Indeed, Ms. Amane had been only too eager to provide Ms. Misora with her reasoning. It still left many unanswered questions, such as what specifically she saw online that made her so convinced of something so absurd.

It almost looked like a vein was bursting in the man's forehead now. L wasn't quite sure what, but he was sure it was something he said. "You…" The man's arms were shaking from where they were placed on the table. "I've always hated you. I hate you *and* your way of doing things! I've always felt like you were keeping things from us and now I know that I was right!!"

“A-Aizawa, h-hey, don’t say that!” Matsuda said weakly, holding up a hand while trying to calm the older man. “You’re talking like you actually believe Ryuzaki might be Kira or something.”

“And what if he is?” Aizawa ground out, his eyes glaring holes in L while he talked. L looked back calmly. “What if, all this time, he’s really been Kira and he’s been giving us the runaround? Don’t you think it’s suspicious that even though we’re working with the *Great Detective L* ,” Aizawa spat out his title like a disease. “Who's never once failed to solve a case, we aren’t any closer to catching Kira than we were when we started? We have *nothing,* despite the fact that it’s been months now!”

L’s fingers twitched minutely, aggravated at having his failure being thrown in his face.

“We’re all trying our best…” Matsuda tried.

“Sure we are! And yet, what do we have to show for it? Nothing but air! And *he* ,” Aizawa pointed a finger at L. “Has more secrets than all of the world governments combined! All we know about him is a bunch of assumed names! Who the hell knows who this guy actually is! You know what,” Aizawa backed away from the desk but didn’t sit down. “I hate the idea of taking some model’s word in the investigation, but she did have a point. Everything makes a lot more sense if L is Kira.”

L noted that Aizawa hadn’t called him by the pseudonym he’d told them to since the group returned from their setup, even though the other investigators were still using it.

“What are you talking about, Aizawa?” Chief Yagami spoke up for the first time in a while, his face perpetually grim.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Aizawa whirled around on the rest of them. “What are the chances that there are two genius people who just happen to be involved in this? Let’s not forget, it was L who volunteered for this case rather than being asked to do it by Interpol. Maybe because he wanted to keep an eye on the investigation? Because he wanted to control it in the direction that he wanted?” Aizawa looked back at L suspiciously.

“L was the one who was convinced that Kira was a single person when the official stance at the time was that “Kira” was actually an organization of many people around the world. *L* was the one who assumed that Kira was in the Kanto region of Japan specifically and just happened to be right.” The man’s tone sounded angrily mocking. “ *Or* maybe it was all a setup, a show.

That girl said it herself, that encounter made Kira famous. And what did we get in return? A general location and nothing else, which means even less if Kira has some kind of ability to see what happens in places where they aren’t physically. Considering everything else Kira seems to be capable of, it’s not even a stretch, though…” Aizawa glared at L as he spoke almost calmly. “If L really is Kira, that answers the question of how Kira knew that Lind L. Tailor was a criminal.”

The load of accusations settled heavily in the room, most of the investigators glancing cautiously at each other. Matsuda looked at Aizawa nervously while Aizawa watched L.

“I can understand your concern.” L said. When L didn’t say anything more, Aizawa’s expression hardened.

He wasn’t sure what to say or how to respond to a situation like this. In all of the potential possibilities that he had entertained with this case, this possibility was not one of them. He hadn’t foreseen this development or the serious turn the case had now taken. L knew that

Aizawa didn't trust him and held general suspicions about him, but as he looked at the man's stance now, he knew that the man didn't have a fraction of trust or respect for him any more. And he probably never would again.

This incident had been the figurative straw that broke the camel's back, it appears. It had been more pressure than Aizawa's shaky trust in L had been able to handle. In all likelihood, Aizawa might have quit working with him quite some time ago if it wasn't for the joint influence of his desire to catch Kira and his abundant respect for his chief.

He had no idea how to deal with this. Perhaps it would be for the best if Aizawa quit the team so that his presence would be less of a hindrance. The problem was that he wasn't sure if Aizawa would be the only one walking out if he pushed for it now and what's more, he couldn't be certain that Aizawa wouldn't spitefully spread distrust about L to the rest of the JPD once he stepped back and returned to his normal job.

"Aizawa," Chief Yagami finally spoke up again, making it clear just how long the silence in the room had stretched with no one saying anything. The man sounded very tired. "You've made your point. I acknowledge that a lot of facts don't make sense, but we have to remember that Misa Amane is a suspect in the case, not a witness. She didn't witness Ryuzaki saying or doing anything suspicious, this is probably just a case of armchair sleuths going down the wrong line of reasoning. We cannot simply act as if she's provided damning evidence against him."

"Sir! How can you defend him after what he's done to your son?! Light's clearly innocent and yet he's been accused of being Kira of all things, surveilled and stalked! It's made worse if L really is Kira because he's put Light through all of that while knowing for a fact that he was innocent! Just to push the blame for his crimes on someone else!" Aizawa pleaded with him.

Soichiro's features hardened, sharply. "Don't bring my son into this. He's none of your business." The statement was short but his tone held all of the authority of a chief of police.

Aizawa's expression twisted in frustration, even as his tone towards his superior remained as respectful as ever. "But Sir, there may be no evidence even if it is the truth. After all, we are dealing with L, here." He threw a judgemental look at the man in question as he said this. "He would have more than enough money and influence to have anything he wanted buried. I'm not taking some model's word for anything, it's not as if our own department hasn't wondered about this connection before." As riled up as the man was, he didn't bring up Light again.

A few members of the group - including Matsuda - shifted uncomfortably at the reminder. Indeed, L had been aware that their department had entertained such as part of their criticisms about him before the majority of them resigned and L agreed to meet with the rest of them. Truthfully, it was part of the reason why he only agreed to meet with the investigators after the bulk of the officers left despite having received numerous requests to meet with them in person since the moment he started his case.

"What are you thinking then, Aizawa?" Ukita asked.

"I can't stay here working for someone who might be the very criminal we're looking for." Aizawa declared. "What if he decides to kill one of us next? Even if he isn't Kira, he has nothing but secrets and I can't stand it!"

"If I were Kira, I would kill you after this regardless of your quitting, Mr. Aizawa." L replied, entirely sensibly. By the expression on the other man's face, he didn't seem to appreciate it, but he didn't get the chance to speak further.

“He has a point, you know.” A calm voice said, causing every head in the room to snap towards the direction of the door. There Light stood, appearing as relaxed as ever, Ms. Misora standing next to him at the door. Light continued speaking as he proceeded further into the room. “Hey, guys. Ms. Naomi’s brought me up to speed on what I missed.”

“Light!” Matsuda grinned brightly, welcoming their youngest member back. Something unpleasant yet undefinable curled in L’s gut at how excited Matsuda was to see him. He tried not to glare at the man but he was sure he’d failed. This was the member that he found particularly annoying.

Light smiled at the man and mimicked his tone. “Touta!” Unpleasant feeling. “We couldn’t help but overhear the tail end of your conversation.” Light and Ms. Misora came to stand on the edge of the group, Light positioning himself right next to his father’s chair.

“You’ve come at a good time, Light. We’re just discussing what we should do moving forward in the investigation.” Soichiro said, smiling at his son.

Light hummed, closing his eyes and tilting his head to the side. “Well, I think quitting is a bit premature.” Light concluded after a moment.

“What!” Aizawa whirled on the boy, eyes blown wide and mouth hanging open in shock. Light didn’t bat an eye at the older man’s reaction. “What on *Earth* are you saying, Light?! He might be Kira, someone who has killed numerous people! How can you even stand to be around him if that was the case?! You yourself were a victim of his accusations!”

“Aizawa…” Soichiro said in a warning tone, looking for all the world like he was a few seconds away from getting up to stand in front of Light.

Light paid his father's tone no attention, either. "And what if he isn't? Kira is a force to be reckoned with. Just because Hideki hasn't caught them yet doesn't mean he's working with them or that he's incompetent. I doubt any of us could do any better without him." Light said with a laugh, despite the serious mien of every other person in the room.

"How can we stay here knowing he might be Kira?" Aizawa questioned.

"I don't know." Light smiled easily. "You can leave if you want, but don't you want to see this case through to the end, no matter what that might be? I can't imagine your pride as an investigator will let you just quit. Don't you think threatening to quit immediately is a little too extreme? There must be a middle ground somewhere."

L was perplexed as he watched the scene and not just because of Light's continual support of him which seemed to exist without reason. L also found himself confused by how their interaction went. As L watched, Light's calm seemed to be almost contagious and Aizawa was visibly calming, lowering his voice from the yell it had been. Whereas L's calm had been infuriating to the man.

He couldn't understand it nor could he place the difference fully on the fact that Light was his chief's son, although that surely played a part. L had realized immediately upon researching him that Light was a charming person who was excellent with socializing, but it was at times like this that he felt the annoyance that came with not realizing how the mechanics of such a skill worked. He also felt the annoyance of recognizing that in that moment, he needed Light to keep from potentially losing the rest of the group to this baseless suspicion.

Matsuda found the nerve to pipe up again. "That's right! Ryuzaki has done his best to lead us, we shouldn't doubt him!"

Light smiled at Matsuda at his words and - bolstered - Matsuda added, "We have no proof that Ryuzaki is Kira besides some idle gossip. We can't act as if we know it's true already." L didn't like Matsuda defending him, either. The man was an annoyance and also an idiot. The day he needed that man's help is the day he'd rather retire from detective work.

Aizawa looked stressed and thoughtful, falling into a pensive silence. "Alright…alright." He sighed, closing his eyes and putting his hand on his forehead. "I'll let this go for now, but something has to change in the long run. I can't work with him like this."

"That's all we ask. Don't worry, we'll figure this out." Ms. Misora said, putting a supportive hand on Light's shoulder and giving him a smile.

"How about we call it a night?" Chief Yagami suggested, casting a look around at the group. "Everyone go home and get refreshed and we'll pick back up in the morning. Is that alright by you, Ryuzaki?" The man turned to L.

"Yes, I think that would be for the best." L conceded, quietly. Even he could tell that the group had reached their limit for the day, they would get no work done like this.

Besides, he had some things to think about, as well.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed! You know…I could have tackled the whole Raye situation with more of a black & white mentality where I just said that Raye was being a jerk and needed to stow the ego and get himself together or that Naomi could leave him because he doesn't love her enough…but that's not really my style. I much prefer using their canon relationship to have a

dialogue about how gender stereotypes are mutually harmful and mentally corrosive! ^v^

But I'd be interested to know how you guys feel about how I'm handling the situation with Raye and Naomi. I'd really like to know what you guys think and if there's somewhere you believe I could improve! Let me know your thoughts!

Care

Chapter Summary

A minor lull in the chaos. Probably.

Chapter Notes

So engineering Near's entrance (and Matt and Mello, but their entrances are less straightforward) is much more my master plan than it is Light's. He hasn't really been engineering this even if he likes Near so this came as something of a surprise to him. It's not really like with Naomi where her entrance was all according to plan.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Naomi returned home early that afternoon, Raye was in the living room waiting for her. The last little while, she'd been finding him in bed, looking like he was too tired to move so she was cautiously relieved to see him in the living area. Hopefully that meant he was feeling better today after Light's visit.

Naomi felt a familiar sadness settle in her at how her fiancé was struggling. He hadn't been able to bounce back after the kidnapping. He barely left their rental and some days were so bad that he couldn't leave their bed all day. She wished she knew what she should do to help, but she didn't know what to do or say.

So instead, she just focused on giving him time. She made her excuses to her parents for him so that he didn't have to see anyone he didn't want to, but she was happy when he'd agreed to Light's offer to visit. She thought it might be good for him to talk to someone who wasn't her, especially since he hadn't been talking to her as much lately as he used to. He'd been quiet and morose, though he'd happily listen to her talk about her day and the investigation. Sometimes she'd even succeed in getting a ghost of a smile from him.

"Hi, Honey. I'm home!" She called gently when he turned to look at

her, smiling for him. Now that he was facing her, she thought that some of the color in his face was back. He looked less pale than he had that morning.

“Oh, Naomi. You’re back early.” Raye observed by way of greeting.

She was, actually. The nights of the investigation were late and even though Naomi made it a point never to stay overnight, she knew that virtually every other member of their small group did. The group had been feeling even more pressure lately to make some progress as the case dragged on and they still got no closer to catching Kira. Naomi tried not to think that that might be why L had been so determined to investigate Light as Kira despite the young man’s clear innocence in the matter.

At any rate, because of that keen pressure they were all feeling, most of them stayed overnight and slept at the hotel these days. Even Light slept over with his father during the weekends and some of the weekdays, being just as invested in the investigation as any of the adults were. Naomi sometimes felt bad about leaving so early when they were all putting their family lives on the side to catch Kira, but she wouldn’t even consider it.

Not right now. If she did that, Raye would be alone all night and she couldn’t stand that with his current state. She’d be worried about him all night, even if she knew he would say it was alright if she called to let him know she was staying over. He certainly wasn’t alright and she didn’t know what to do about it.

“Yes, I am.” She responded, going to the kitchen table to place her bag on it. She attempted to surreptitiously check the sink to see if he had eaten the lunch she’d prepared for him.

Raye wasn’t often out of bed by the time she left in the mornings these

days and when he was, he usually sat listlessly in the living room, staring off into space. So saying, he skipped breakfast, rarely eating it when she prepared it so she had taken to picking up breakfast for herself after she left rather than making it at home.

She did premake a healthy lunch for him and reminded him that it was there every morning when she left. Sometimes it was still there when she got home. Those were the nights where she tried especially hard to get him to eat dinner and Raye - trying to comfort her - would drag himself through the meal, looking like he was just going through the motions as he ate instead of enjoying it. This only caused her worry about him to increase, but somehow she didn't think that staying home all day every day and babysitting her fiancé would make him feel much better.

She just didn't know what to do.

Naomi let out a relieved sigh under her breath when she saw that the empty plate was in the sink. Feeling a little lighter at seeing that he'd at least eaten, she headed back into the living room with a smile and took another look at her fiancé's countenance. He did look better than earlier and she hoped that that meant Light's visit had made him feel better. She felt her warm feelings towards Light grow at that prospect.

"A lot happened today," She sighed as she sat next to him on the couch. "L decided that everyone should go home to decompress from everything and be fresh for tomorrow."

That was the essence of what happened, albeit a gross oversimplification. Naomi felt deeply grateful for being able to go home early that day and not just for Raye, either. Everything that had happened was still swirling around in her head and she was feeling mentally exhausted. She was still having trouble grasping all that had happened in just the last few hours.

With tensions riding as high as they were when they'd left each other, it was definitely for the best that everyone got the night to take care of their own emotions and mental states. They weren't getting any work done like this and they would only bite at each other until they decided where they stood. Naomi herself needed to think about how the situation had changed before she went back tomorrow.

"Was it something dangerous?" Raye asked, glancing at her. She could tell he was trying to hide it, but it was clear that he was worried. He'd always taken her safety very seriously and it had been one of the things he mentioned most often when he insisted she stay out of the Kira Case. He had become especially concerned after his kidnapping and her joining the Kira Case as an active member and she felt terribly guilty for worrying him.

Naomi didn't want to tell him the whole truth but she also didn't want to lie to him, so she thought about what had happened carefully before she spoke. "No, it wasn't. We were just confronting someone who we believe is a supporter of Kira. We were looking for additional information that we could use to catch Kira, but I think we got more than we bargained for."

She then turned and gave a soft smile to her fiancé, placing her hand on his comfortingly. "I'm fine." She took the time to reassure him.

Raye actually returned it with a smile of his own, placing his other hand on top of hers. "Good." He said softly, gazing at her.

He really is doing well tonight, Naomi thought with relief. "Tell me about your conversation with Light." She really wanted to know what Light said to her fiancé to bring him out of his funk even just a little bit.

The smile on Raye's face slipped and he removed his hands from her. Naomi had just enough time to worry that she had ruined the atmosphere when Raye spoke. "Naomi, there was something I wanted to talk to you about with that."

"Of course." Naomi said with surprise. Given how little he had been speaking lately, she hadn't expected there to be something he'd want to talk about, but she was eager to hear about whatever it was. "What did you want to talk about?"

Raye paused briefly. "Light gave me some things to think about and I've been doing that in the time since he'd left."

"What's that?" Naomi asked, growing curious and concerned in equal measure.

"Naomi, are you really happy being a mother?" Raye burst out.

"Of course, Raye. You know I want children." Naomi responded in shock. How had this come about?

Raye looked confused for a moment like he didn't know what to make of her response, but then something clicked in his expression and he looked to understand something. He immediately came forward with another question. "What about with being a stay-at-home mother?"

Naomi found she couldn't respond right away. She felt an instinctive agreement well up but it stuck in her throat. She wanted to tell him that it was fine, but it felt disingenuous. She thought of her regret when she turned in her resignation to her job, the discontentment she'd felt when she'd begun to spend her days at home taking care of the house and realizing that this would be her life.

She heard in her head Light asking her why she'd quit if she still liked her job and if she was good at it. She felt the excitement and relief at choosing to accept the request for her to join the Kira Case and how it had felt like she'd taken back the power of her own life for the first time in a while.

She couldn't make herself tell him that she was happy with that. She was having enough trouble telling herself that, as she had been trying to for a long while now.

Raye's expression looked drawn - as if he were in pain - as he watched her struggle to find a response to that loaded question. At the same time, he also looked vaguely like something he had suspected had just been proven to him. When the seconds went by and she could still think of nothing to say, Raye spoke again. "I'm sorry, Naomi."

That wasn't at all what she'd thought he would say, insofar as she had expectations, and her expression went slack in surprise. "What are you sorry for, Raye? You have nothing to apologize for." She fumbled, unsure what he was thinking of.

"No, I do." Raye insisted, shaking his head and looking at her again with a serious expression. A few seconds later, his expression crumbled and he rubbed a hand aggressively across his face. "I'm sorry, I don't know how to talk about this or what to say."

"Honey…" Naomi reached out to put her hand on his. "What's going on?"

"Light and I spoke about the kidnapping today." Raye admitted, causing Naomi's heart to skip a beat. Raye hadn't said a word about the kidnapping after being interviewed by L. He hasn't wanted to say anything to her about it, except to reassure her that he wasn't harmed during it.

Raye sucked in a breath. “When you told me that Light wanted to see me, I wanted to do my best to entertain him despite how crappy I’ve been feeling…I wanted to properly meet the boy I’ve heard so many amazing things about. You know, when I wasn’t following him.” Raye scratched his cheek in embarrassment at the recollection. “I wanted to thank him for the things he did for you when I was gone.”

So that’s why… Naomi thought with some surprise. She figured that the reason Raye had been more willing to see Light than her parents was because he didn't want them to meet him for the first time in his current state. Light was just a friend of hers so it wasn’t as high stakes and maybe he was getting a little tired of only seeing her every day.

To think, he was trying hard to push past his current problems because he desperately wanted to show his gratitude to someone who had helped his fiancé in a tough time. A small warmth burst in her chest.

“But when he got here, he noticed how I was feeling and before I knew what was happening, we were talking about me…” Raye’s lips twisted into a sardonic smile.

Naomi felt her own lips lifting into a soft smile. “Yes, I noticed that Light does that, as well. One moment you’re talking with him about any number of random things, the next you’re discussing all of the feelings you’ve had deep down. Sometimes you don’t even notice you’re doing it and when you realize it, you can’t even mind it because he’s so gentle and understanding about it when he asks.”

Raye’s expression turned sad as he listened to his fiancé. “Light told me that I should do a better job of listening to you.”

“What?” Naomi snapped out of her thoughts, looking back to her fiancé.

“He didn’t tell me what you two talked about exactly, but he did talk about some of your feelings.” Raye smiled sadly. “I didn’t think you were so upset about quitting your job to be a stay-at-home wife. I knew you were unhappy with it at first, but…” He drew off, wincing at his own train of thought.

“I-” Naomi felt a momentary wave of panic. She wasn’t sure what she should say, but she didn’t want her fiancé to feel pressured right now with the state he was in. Should she deny it? Play it down?

It was just then that she recalled something strange that Light had said a couple hours ago when she’d picked him up. Light had just turned to her and told her that she should talk to Raye about how she really felt and when she tried to ask why, he wouldn’t give his reasoning. She had found it strange that he brought it up out of nowhere and then let it go just as easily.

Now she realized that it must have been the remnants of the conversation he’d just had with Raye. She knew that Light was only trying to help, so she couldn’t be mad at him, but she wished he hadn’t said anything.

Naomi recalled when Light had come down to the car after she had called him, letting him know what she was there. Light had come out to the car looking tired after being with Raye awhile but at the same time pleased with how their meeting had gone.

Before she could decide on a course to take, Raye spoke up again. “Light had told me that we aren’t communicating well. I didn’t want to hear it at first, but after some thought, I’m willing to acknowledge that he might have been right.” Raye said, his brows furrowing.

“What do you mean?” Naomi asked.

“I pressured you to quit your job when you didn’t want to, didn’t I?” Raye asked, staring at the floor.

The room fell silent. Naomi didn’t say anything, Raye didn’t say anything. He just waited for her words to come, but what did she say?

There had been a time recently when she had begun to believe as Raye did, that it was for the best that she did quit, but being near this investigation stirred that part of her that hadn’t gone away. Despite how much he’d told her to stay out of it, she couldn’t. She was desperate to be involved and in the weeks following, it was made clear to her just how unhappy she had been with her life recently. Not with Raye, but with how she was living her days. Aimless, without purpose. Waiting to feel that fulfillment from taking care of the home that Raye kept telling her she would feel if she gave it time.

If it was her calling to be an FBI agent, did that mean she couldn’t have a family? She didn’t want that, either. Maybe it was the right decision for her to give up on starting a family in favor of her career and personal happiness, because the adult world told her she couldn’t have both. One or the other. Is that really what she should tell Raye? She wondered if she should just wait it out until Raye moved on.

But Raye wasn't saying anything. He just kept waiting for her to speak, staying quiet. Looking at him, Naomi got the impression that he was prepared to wait until she answered. Reluctantly, and second guessing herself the whole time, Naomi made an admission because she couldn't lie to his face.

"I don't think I felt comfortable leaving my job. I don't think I was ever comfortable with it." She couldn't look him in the eye. If she could have, she would've seen the pained look that crossed her fiance's expression at her admittance.

"Are you…are you happy being with me?" She heard Raye ask with palpable hesitancy and her surprise and panic at hearing such a question caused her head to shoot back up.

"Of course I am!" And she meant it wholly. She could still remember when she'd first met Raye. She hadn't liked him at all at first when he was introduced to their branch.

He was polite and restrained and didn't have much of a presence and she had just seen him as another guy she had to work with. She had just hoped he wouldn't be too much of an annoyance and they didn't do more than greet each other every morning for months. That is, until she came across a particularly dangerous case.

During that case where she could very well have died, he was the only one of her peers who reached out to help her in the case as things got progressively heated. She hadn't needed to ask, he took the initiative to offer his help even though they hadn't been close at the time. Maybe normally she would have been annoyed, feeling like yet another man at work was looking at her like she was incompetent because she was a woman, but she remembered seeing the determined and concerned look on his face and the relief she felt at the time that she would have someone to back her up on this.

They had solved the case together and he had stayed by her side throughout it. They'd investigated together, nearly died together…and he had stuck to his promise to help her way past when most men would have felt overwhelmed and run. He showed how loyal and brave he could be.

They'd never really gone back to being simply work colleagues after that, they had been through too much together even if the case had finished. Morning greetings had turned into catch up sessions which turned into lunch or movie dates and in short, they became very close and fell in love.

She had been proposed to by a brave and dedicated, albeit stubborn and protective man and she loved him deeply.

Raye looked taken aback by her effusive response, but it resulted in the first real smile crossing his face that evening. "You don't know how happy I am to hear that."

Naomi reached out and grabbed both his hands in hers. "Were you worried I didn't love you anymore?" Because she couldn't stand that horrible idea.

“I think I’ve been behaving badly.” Raye said instead, his lack of a direct answer very telling.

“Raye, can you please tell me what’s going on with you?” Naomi asked gently. “Talk to me.”

Raye stared into her eyes and then took a heavy breath. “Okay. Okay, you’re right, I need to talk to you. Light said the same thing, too. That I need to talk to you more and we need to communicate better.”

Light said that? Naomi wondered in awe.

“I’ve been thinking about it since he left and you’re right, too. We need to have a long talk about some things.” Raye looked every inch

like someone who didn't want that talk, but the determination she'd so loved about him shined through even now. Whatever he had heard from Light made him determined to talk even if doing so made him uncomfortable.

Naomi's lips spread into a soft smile as she gazed at her bedraggled fiancé. "Yes, let's have a good talk tonight and we'll have a nice dinner, too. And Raye?" She gently squeezed his hands in her own. "Thank you."

~ ❻ ~

"Light! You guys are home! We weren't sure if you'd be staying out again." Sayu cried out in surprise when Light and their father walked through the door to their home. Her loud exclamations drew out their mother from somewhere upstairs."

"Dear, you're home. Not staying late tonight?" She exclaimed with her own surprise, though without yelling like Sayu had done.

"No, we all decided to take an early night to wrap our heads around some new developments in the case." Sochiro said vaguely.

"Hey, Sayu. Did you guys have a good day?" Light asked.

"Nothing much happened. Oh! But a new episode of that new drama came out! You know the one? I was telling you about it earlier!" Sayu burst out in excitement and rushed forward to her brother, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him over to the TV that she'd apparently been sitting in front of before Light and his dad had showed up.

“Yeah, it was alright.” Sayu responded. “What about you guys?”

"Everything's okay." Soichiro started.

"The team almost imploded." Light said. It was only too true. Actually, the blowup had been more than he'd expected and he'd had to do damage control ASAP to stop the team from devolving into anarchy. He still enjoyed the fallout of what he'd unleashed, though.

"Light!" His dad's head shot towards him in surprise but Light wasn't the least bit sorry.

"Really?" Sayu's eyes glittered in excitement. Apparently being chaos mongers was a common thread among the Yagami children. "What happened??"

This time, Soichiro sent Light a warning look as he interceded. "We can't give any details. It's all still privileged information."

"Of the 'if we told you, we'd have to kill you' variety." Light said, winking playfully at his little sister who giggled.

"Aww." She pouted. "I'd love to know what's going on with your work. Nothing interesting ever happens here."

"That's a good thing." Their mother admonished her gently.

Light thought back to when his sister was kidnapped and how her mental state fell apart afterward and had to agree with their mom. He

never wanted his sister to go through something like that again.

~ ❶ ~

The next morning came and L was doing research into Ms. Amane's story. He was shocked when he went to check various social media websites after the earlier altercation. It hadn't been that long since he'd checked it, but it almost seemed as if the sites had exploded in that time. The theory that he and Kira were one and the same was an uncommon theory a few months ago, but it had suddenly - seemingly without reason - surged in popularity.

This had to have been what Ms. Amane was talking about when she said that she saw it online. Something here or a combination of all of it must have been what convinced her. Most of it was cluttered, with different posts being shared and reposted all over the place, but after a little while, he could discern a small handful of ringleaders to all this. Just a few media accounts that seemed to be the cause of all of this. If he looked a little more…

"Ryuzaki, could we speak for a moment?" Soichiro asked seriously, tearing L's attention away from his research. He pulled up a chair and sat down next to him.

"Of course. Is there something you wish to say?" L responded, quickly closing out the tabs he was using. Ordinarily, he would continue researching as they talked, but he didn't think he wanted the elder Yagami to see evidence of the suddenly popular theory that he was Kira.

He doubted shoving its existence in his face would help his case.

"You and I both know that there are only going to be more arguments

about your role in this investigation in the future." The man said in a heavy tone.

"You are right about that." As much as L hated to admit it, it was obvious. The group was becoming torn and it may not be long until they reverted back to being L on one side and everyone else on the other.

"My men don't trust you." Soichiro said directly. "Some are more quiet and indirect about it than others, but I've known them a long time. I can see it in their faces. I wanted to talk to you privately about what can be done to keep the investigation going and the team from falling apart."

L couldn't help but be even more impressed with the man than he already was. The dedication the man had always shown to the case and to his police work in general was truly worthy of admiration. There weren't many older men out there who would so quickly put their pride aside for the good of the whole.

If only his son wasn't Kira.

"I'm surprised that you aren't taking their side more than you are. Though I am grateful for the fact that you haven't quit yet. I know you have your own problems with me at the moment." L pointed out quietly.

Soichiro was quiet for a second and then said, "I do have problems with you, but they are not important right now. I don't believe that you're really Kira, so our goal right now should be to keep the investigation going or else we are in danger of losing to Kira."

"I agree with you." L said. "That is my primary concern, as well."

"Then I have to ask you if there is anyone we can bring into the investigation as a co-leader." Soichiro said.

"You mean someone to take a significant amount of the power in the investigation away from me." L observed.

"It would make my men feel more comfortable staying on with the investigation." Soichiro said as his answer. "It's the only option I can think of that might work besides someone leaving the investigation."

The man could have been including Aizawa leaving the investigation in that statement, but L was quite sure it also carried the implication of L himself being forced to leave the investigation. Officially, at least. The governments could cease working with him and withdraw their support, but he would simply carry on with his own investigation without them.

The idea that Light - whom he knew to be Kira - would stop coming around though, was a result with far more consequence to it. After all, if Light's father was no longer working with L and their department was no longer supporting the detective, Light might not be able to continue being part of L's team. No, that wouldn't do.

As discontented as L was by the idea that he should hand over any substantial control in his own investigation, especially if it was because his character was being doubted so thoroughly, L had considered it himself in the time between their team's last discussion. It was the only workable plan going forward. While he had briefly considered other actions, he doubted that any half measures would work in this circumstance.

"Did you have anyone in mind?" L asked.

“The obvious choice would be asking both Eraldo Coil and Danuve to oversee the investigation. It seems only right that the second and third greatest detectives in the world should be brought on board, given our current troubles.” Soichiro responded.

"No, that won't work." L muttered, staring at his computer screen instead of the man next to him.

"And why not?" Soichiro asked him with surprise.

"Because they are both me. Long ago, I began to operate as a detective under different names, but I must ask you to keep that a secret." L wouldn't have admitted that if he didn't feel pressured by circumstances to do so. To not do so would make himself look even guiltier in the eyes of the investigators.

Soichiro looked lost for words for a few long moments but to his credit, he neither asked L if he was serious nor for proof of his claims. Instead, what he said next was, "What would you suggest, then?"

This was just what L was waiting for. "There is an organization that I am a part of. That organization specializes in finding and educating exceptional individuals. I know of a few individuals from this organization that we can request to join the investigation."

"Are they trustworthy?" Soichiro questioned.

L hummed. "I believe so. They have been trained for things like this, although it may be better not to mention to the others that they are part of the same organization as I am." He suspected the connection wouldn't be doing him any favors.

"I don't like being asked to keep so much information from my men." Soichiro said, his brows furrowing.

"It's for the continuation of the investigation." L stated. "We hardly have any better option."

"I suppose that's true." Soichiro acknowledged, still sounding uncomfortable.

"I do have a suggestion about how to employ these new additions in a way that I find more effective than simply dropping them all into the investigation." L added, hoping to gain back some of the man's support with this aspect of the plan.

"'All'?" Soichiro repeated in confusion. "Just how many new investigators are you suggesting we get?"

"There will be three."

~ ❻ ~

Light was scheming again.

It was a secret of the utmost priority, the plan that he and Ryuk were putting together. From the moment the beginnings of the plan entered his mind, Light knew that it would take an exceedingly large amount of time and planning in order to make it airtight.

And a plot like this *needed* to be airtight.

Not that Light was intending to put it into action very soon, he had the time. In fact, this plan was only meant to be put into play when Light really needed a disruption, to L or to the investigation. It wasn't like he was particularly eager to enact this one, though Ryuk kept talking about how it was going to be a riot. *And* about how it was probably going to send his dad into the stratosphere when they did it, which was at least part of the reason Light was putting it off until he really felt it was necessary.

Which was certainly not now. Things were progressing way too smoothly for him to feel it was necessary. His talk with Raye went better than he'd hoped. He'd wanted to talk with Raye in part because of that strange first conversation with Naomi and in part because he was concerned how the guy might be doing after having been kidnapped. Even if the kidnapping hadn't ended up affecting him badly, Light couldn't imagine that being stuck in a foreign country where he didn't really know anyone besides his fiancé who was always busy these days was particularly easy for him.

Having talked it through with Raye, Light felt like he had a much better idea now of the troubles in their relationship and how they were both feeling. And he had hope that they could both be happier moving forward if they could admit that there was a problem to each other, not just to him. He had to fight the urge to get overly involved, but he knew that they needed to take the reins now and work things out themselves. He'd pull back from now on into just a supporting role and hope for the best.

Light smiled when he thought about his own family situation. In his past life, you would be hard pressed to get him to acknowledge that there was any kind of problem in his family unit. At the beginning of this one, you couldn't have convinced him that it could be fixed. But now, after talking with his dad and spending time with Sayu, he believed that people could change their relationships with the people they cared about, if they were willing to put in the effort.

And he believed that Naomi and Raye would put their everything into it.

On the Misa and L front, things had blown up spectacularly and he couldn't be more pleased with it. As usual, Misa surprised even him with her loose lips and lack of a brain-to-mouth filter. For once, it wasn't to his detriment, though.

Light had thought that she would take a while to eat away at L, but now he wasn't sure why he thought that. The very first time he'd formally met her, she had showed up at his house without his knowledge, lied to his family to get in, and hung around in his bedroom until he got back. If anyone had no concept of self-control or moderation, it was absolutely her. She didn't do things by halves, not with her affections or with her methods.

Light hadn't needed to hide his shock at all when Naomi had picked him up from her and Raye's rental and gave him the rundown of what had happened on the way back to the hotel. Misa did what?! Light had tried his hardest not to burst into surprised laughter at what she'd told him. To declare upon first meeting in a public area, even a remote one, that you believe L and Kira are the same person!! Who *else* would do any such thing but her? It was beautiful in how chaotic it was!

It accelerated everything Light had been planning! Especially with Aizawa going for L's throat, like he'd always done. He'd had to fight the man nearly tooth-and-nail in order to keep him from either quitting and possibly taking other members with him or forcing L out. The man was going to be even more of pain moving forward from this. Light was under no illusions that he wouldn't have to deal with the man more decisively sometime in the future. The man was good at his job, but a real heel in other areas of the investigation… aka. just about any time he had to take orders from L.

Light couldn't think of the other man and his behavior without a scowl sweeping across his face briefly, though he managed to shake the man out of his mind easily enough. He didn't like ruminating on the man more than he had to because he was one of those people that Light had never overly cared for, despite having worked with him for a very long time.

As Light stood outside thinking about these things, it was the end to another school day. L, once again, hadn't shown up for class, proving once again how he never took his role as a student even half seriously. He pretty much showed up on the days when he felt like it, which were few and far between. He was waiting outside his school gate for Watari to come pick him up.

It started maybe two weeks ago, L suggested that Watari should pick Light up from school on the days when he went to college. Inferences could be made about L's secret motives for making such a suggestion, but it made logical sense. On days when both Light and his dad were at their home, Light could catch a ride with his father to the hotel of the week, but it became more of an issue when his dad was already there and too busy to leave.

Despite the fact that L was convinced Light was Kira, he was keeping up the act that he had mostly moved past those suspicions and claimed that he didn't want Light - or anyone else, for that matter - to walk to the hotels because it made them much easier to follow. You know, like he himself had had Light followed by Raye earlier on, Light had thought wryly.

At any rate, that had led to the current system they had now, where Light got picked up after class by Watari and taken to the hotel they were currently set up in. A few of his peers whose names he pretended he didn't forget came up to talk to him and Light put in the effort to make pleasant conversation with them while he waited. When he caught the familiar black car pulling up out of his peripheral vision, Light politely made his excuses and met up with the elderly gentleman.

The ride back was nothing special, even with Ryuk sitting next to him in the back of the car and making one-sided conversation. Sometimes Ryuk hung around with Light and sometimes he kept an eye on L and the investigation. Still, even though everything during the day had been normal up until that point, Light became aware of the creeping feeling that something was up. It wasn't anything that Watari had done - the man had greeted him as usual like the consummate professional he was - and everything was following the pattern they'd established over the last weeks.

It was impossible to say what was setting his senses off, it just seemed to be his instincts. Light tried to wait it out for a few minutes but the feeling only increased, becoming even more impossible to ignore the longer he felt it despite it not telling him anything about what might be different this time. So Light - with affected calm - reached into his backpack and pulled out one of his notebooks. He quickly jotted a paragraph of seemingly random thoughts onto a blank page, holding it low enough that Ryuk could easily tell what he was doing and lean over him to read the code hidden in it.

"I have the strangest feeling L's trying something. Can you scout ahead and see if it's serious?" Was what Light had written.

"Sure thing, Light-o! I'll figure it out! Leave it to me~" Ryuk responded immediately, spreading his wings and straightening out from his crouched posture on the car's back seat. A second later, Ryuk had shot through the ceiling and then he was gone.

Light let out a subtle sigh under his breath. If Ryuk was looking into it, then he could relax until he got there. If something really was up and it was something serious, Ryuk would get the measure of it and rush back. If it wasn't serious, then it wasn't a problem.

Light endeavored to calm down as he waited out the rest of the ride

back to the hotel, but he couldn't stop himself from wondering what was up. He kept turning the situation around in his mind and venturing down several trains of thought until they finally pulled up to the hotel.

The ride was always longer than necessary because Watari took several wrong turns and went in at least one circle just to make the route harder to trace. Normally the ride went by too slowly for Light, who was always eager to see L. However, this time Light was so lost in his thoughts about what could be the matter that it felt to him almost as if they teleported there.

Ryuk was reclining in the air in the lobby when Watari and Light got there and by his posture, the brunette could tell that the situation wasn't serious. Light's shoulders slouched as he let go of what little stress he was carrying. Upon seeing Light enter, Ryuk twirled and sped over to him, swirling around him as he spoke.

"Hey, Light-o! You were right, there's been a disturbance in the group, but you're gonna love it!" He cackled.

Light continued walking steadily towards the elevator, his eyes fixed straight ahead, to pretend that Ryuk wasn't there. Ryuk moved with him, the other Shinigami's surprisingly agile wings carrying him forward as Light walked while at the same time continuing to spin in circles around Light.

Hmm…something I'm going to love? I wonder what it is? Light thought about it as he and Watari silently made their way to the elevator and then started taking it up. In the confines of the elevator, Ryuk stopped doing circles around Light and instead took up a position hovering behind them.

Watari rarely talked and he'd barely spoken to the man. Whether he

had business in the room or not, Watari always walked him to the main investigation room and it always left Light with the vague feeling that he was being escorted under guard.

Not that it would help them at all if that's really how they're thinking of it, Light glanced above Watari's head. Quillsh Wammy, the name hovering above the elderly man's head in red writing was stark and it made this whole pseudonym business even more of a farce.

If Watari and L knew what Light saw every time he looked at them, they'd probably freak out and he wasn't eager to see in what way.

The pair finally came to the door of the main room and Watari reached for the handle, Ryuk cackling in the background. Curiosity nearly getting the best of him, Light turned to Watari obviously and asked in a faux casual tone, "So what's new today?"

Ryuk realized immediately what he was doing and attempted to stop laughing.

"I am sure that Ryuzaki will inform you of everything that has occurred in your absence." Watari responded calmly, as he began to push open the door.

"Oh, you're gonna love this, Light!" Ryuk reiterated, letting out small chuckles under his breath. "We've got ourselves a little visitor!" The door to the room swung open just as Ryuk finished speaking.

Light had just enough time to wonder who his friend meant as he stepped past Watari into the room when Light caught sight of a head of white hair. Alerted by the noise of their arrival, most of the members of the group turned to greet them. Slower than the others, the young boy to whom the hair belonged waited several seconds

before looking over his shoulder at Light. And their gazes met.

Above his head hovered the words “Nate River”.

Chapter End Notes

Near's here. I'm going to enjoy this immensely.

Primrose Love

Chapter Summary

L just can't catch a break and there's Light, being all complicated again.

Chapter Notes

The title can refer to both the Light/L pairing and the Naomi/Raye pairing, but Light and L are the ones featured in this chap. One of the things that primroses are said to symbolize is undying love (a lot of flowers are said to symbolize this). If there was any kind of love that I thought symbolized the kind we see a lot in my story, especially Light's, it's probably undying.

Also, I may not have gotten the time to read over this chapter as much as I would've liked to in the effort to get it out without too much delay. So if there are errors, you know the drill! If you see something, say something~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light stood in front of the doorway for several long moments, staring at the boy who sat on the floor instead of in a chair.

It's him…and he looks so incredibly young… The thought went through Light's mind as he gazed on the person who had inadvertently set the events of this life in motion. *Although…I still don't know how dying managed to bring me back to the past.* It suddenly occurred to him that he hadn't given it much thought, how he'd come back. At any rate, it wasn't the concern at the moment.

"Why…" Light starts to pull himself together, forcefully pushing his shock down. "Why is there a child here?"

"Apparently, he's the new leader of the investigation." Naomi said, looking like she too was still coming to grips with the new situation, despite getting there earlier than him.

"A child? A little boy?" Because he was one. He was young when they'd first met but now he could only be described as a little kid, even if he still had that dead look in his eyes. What did the boy go through to give him such a look?

“A damn child.” Aizawa muttered scathingly, seemingly by way of agreement.

Light couldn’t hold himself back by the door anymore and didn’t wait for a reply from L. Light practically teleported to Nate’s side and before anyone could react, Light took off his jacket that he wore during the early morning and draped it over the boy’s shoulders. Nate froze, his whole body stiffening in surprise, but Light was already too fixated to take any real notice of it. He gently but firmly turned the boy towards him so that he could zip up the jacket, cocooning the kid in it.

“You look cold.” Light muttered, loud enough for the whole room to hear. Nate was wearing a familiar looking pristine white outfit and it not only made him look washed out but on his small frame, made him look small and cold. Light’s jacket was very big on him, his hands swamped by the sleeves. The boy’s expression had changed from something bland and almost emotionless to wide eyed surprise, blinking dumbly at Light as if the older boy was some strange, unidentified creature.

Light wasn’t looking at anyone else besides Nate, but the whole room was silent. It was L who spoke first and not unusual for him, he chose the wrong thing to focus on. “I understand he may be young, but I assure you he is qualified to be here. I have confidence in his skills to take charge of this investigation.” L’s words caused Light to pause in his fussing, not even caring about L’s perplexed expression as his gaze drifted between Light and Nate.

"Hideki." Light said with a deadly calm, his bangs momentarily hanging down to cover his eyes as he spoke. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nate blink in confusion at the name Light was calling L by, looks like that whole story wasn't explained to him. "I'm interested to know what exactly you were thinking when you thought it was a good idea to bring in a young child to work on a murder investigation." Light turned slightly to shoot L a *look* out of the corner of his eye.

L stiffened uncomfortably yet minutely at having Light's ire pointed towards him. It wasn't as if he weren't used to a large amount of aggression, distrust, and - on occasion - murderous intent directed at him, but he couldn't recall Light ever looking quite so angry at him before. Perhaps that was when he felt so wrong footed by it and didn't know how to react.

L hesitated to give a response, not knowing what to say and not wanting to say the wrong thing. If anything, Light's seething look intensified the longer L went without responding.

"Hideki, your thoughts please." Light said in that faux calm.

"...He is…someone whose intelligence is on par with my own and has experience in solving violent crimes." L looked like he wanted to say more, but nothing else was forthcoming.

"So. Let me get this straight." Light was aware that his smile was becoming toothy but he was too upset to stop it. Because he hadn't realized just how young Nate was when he started solving crime. He was *tiny* . "This boy has been solving *violent* crimes for years now, at least. And now he's been brought onto the Kira case, with a killer who can kill people without being present. And you *somehow* think it is both normal and appropriate for a child this young to be involved in this kind of thing."

If Light had been in any other emotional state but the one he was in, he would've found it amusing when the look on L's face actually looked somewhat like he was being hunted. Instead, he was actually angry at the other man for possibly the first time in this life.

"...He has exceptional skills." L replied after a long pause, as if that skill somehow made the boy an exception to most children in his eyes. It probably did.

"And his skills somehow negate your responsibility to act as a responsible adult?" Light demanded, hopefully in a somewhat neutral tone.

"I…" L looked completely out of his depth. "I don't…no?" He replied, it coming out sounding more like a question, as if he was checking if that was the right thing to say.

It was…hard for Light to stay very angry when it was so clear that he didn't really get what was wrong with the situation or how to deal with it. That did make Light a little annoyed, but more than anything, he suddenly felt that being angry with L wouldn't accomplish anything here.

Later, Light thought to himself. *We'll talk about this later.*

"Hideki, does this child really need to be here? It's dangerous." And while Light only half meant that since as Kira, he was the biggest threat and he had no intention of hurting the small bean, being on a murder investigation was still incredibly dangerous for a small child. And it appeared that Nate had done something like this at least a few times before, with L's approval, no less.

In hindsight, Light hadn't truly thought about where Nate and the

others had come from or how they got into their line of work. He wasn't sure exactly how old Nate was when they'd first met although Light remembered thinking at the time how strangely young the boy was, but he was significantly older than he was now. Yet, he was already solving cases. Something was going on here and Light didn't like the look of it.

"Believe me, I wouldn't have asked him to come here if I didn't believe it had become absolutely necessary." L responded with a noticeable hint of frustration in his tone, albeit he was probably relieved to be let off from whatever had triggered Light's anger. Whether that frustration in his voice was noticeable to anyone besides Light remained to be seen.

"Is that because you take this child's safety seriously or because having him here is yet again admitting that you've lost to Kira?" Light parried. Something in the room clattered after Light said that. Someone probably dropped something but he didn't turn around to check. With the team's distrust of L nearing its peak, he probably shouldn't be doing this here, but he was beyond caring at the moment.

L's response actually surprised him. "Which would you prefer?" Normally, L at least made an effort to pretend to be genuine, but this moment he seemed to give up the pretense.

His surprise caused Light to pause for several long seconds before responding, but he came around quickly enough. "The first one, but I suspect it's the second." The brunette deadpanned.

L's lips twitched, but he didn't respond. Instead of saying anything else to him, Light turned back to the little boy who had sat mostly forgotten while watching the situation play out. "Hi." Light cooed, softening his voice as he once again looked at the young version of the boy he had sacrificed his second life for. "What's your name?"

“I’m Near.” The white haired boy gave the predictable response, despite the other name hovering just above his head.

I’m going to have to get used to thinking of him as Near again or I might actually call him Nate by accident, Light concluded. “It’s nice to meet you, Near. Has everyone here been kind to you so far.”

They’ve been…fine.” Nate—Near responded, though he looked deeply confused as he spoke. His brows furrowed a little as he looked at Light, his gaze drifting between Light and his jacket that he’d draped around him.

Light merely maintained his pleasant smile. “Are you okay to start with the case? Are you too tired from your trip here? It’s okay for you to have a nap if you are.”

“My trip?” Near latched onto Light’s choice of words. Because one of the only things Light could conclude about Near’s past is that he isn’t a Japanese citizen.

“Well, I assume you’re not from around here, given your accent.” The lie came from Light smoothly, without missing a single beat. It wasn’t a complete lie, the boy’s accent was telling about where he wasn’t from, but Light had just generally come to the silent acknowledgement some time ago that neither Near nor L were from anywhere nearby, as well as the fact that they probably traveled a great deal for their work.

“…I’m not too tired.” Near responded, hesitantly.

“Okay,” Light acknowledged easily, having expected that response. “But if you get too tired, just let us know, okay? You’re just a kid, so

it’s okay for you to need breaks like that.”

A childish scowl appeared on Near’s face at that, but to Light, it just looked adorable. “I assure you I am fully capable of being on this case.” He said defensively.

“Of course.” Light said with a wide smile, patting the boy’s head. He could imagine that would make the boy pout harder, but he couldn’t help it. The kid was so small and so cute! And *someone* had to have his best interests at heart, considering what L was encouraging this boy to engage in.

Light pried himself from the boy’s side for a fraction of a second to grab a chair and pull it up right next to him. And that’s where he stayed for the next several hours, practically hovering over the young boy protectively as the meeting progressed from there.

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L briefly considered if it was an act. It was quickly discarded.

L was baffled, nonplussed. Light's behavior was staggering. It beggared belief and there was no reasonable explanation for it. It was simply absurd!

It’s like with Matsuda all over again, L thought with his usual twitch of annoyance. But it was. Light had come in and taken a completely sudden, unreasonable liking to Near the same way as Matsuda and L was still no closer to understanding the cause of it. Sure, Light was winsome and engaged easily with others, but the behavior with these two particular individuals still didn’t make any sense.

If L had made a prediction about what he thought would happen when Light arrived, it would have been that Light would become tense at the new face in the investigation and immediately want information that he could use to his advantage in this war of theirs. Well, Light wanted answers but it wasn't exactly how L had expected.

After seeing Near, it would be no exaggeration to say that Light shot into the room and immediately bundled Near into a jacket. And then Light had turned his attention to L and not in the affectionate way L was becoming used to. Instead, he was upset with L and making all sorts of demands for his reasoning and L didn't know what to tell him. Rather than feeling threatened by Near's presence, it seemed that Light couldn't get past the fact that Near was a child. It seemed to be the sticking point for him.

Even as the team meeting proceeded, Light would interject with mild complaints about the topic every so often. He would go on about who the kid was and why he was on the investigation team at all and what the hell L thought he was doing bringing a child onto such a dangerous case and did L have anything to say for himself and L…L just didn't get it.

He didn't get why Light was so protective over a child that he had never met before.

Sure, the other members of the group had objected in their own ways before Light had shown up - none of which was unexpected - but Light was in a league of his own, as usual. Light almost looked like he was Near's father or older brother, with the way he was acting. An instantaneous, spiritual adoption.

Far from being threatened by Near's presence, Light was the one doing the threatening. Or at least, that's how L felt when the younger man stared him down after taking his attention away from Near. L couldn't think of anything threatening that Light had actually *said* , but he couldn't help but feel distinctly threatened all the same.

“Now, one more time, how exactly did you meet this kid?” Aizawa asked with that angry expression he always seemed to have when talking to L specifically.

L sighed inwardly.

He was truly frustrated with how many times he had to repeat things for these people. The only person who had the intelligence and insight to know what L was trying to say without him having to spell it out for them was Light and L was absolutely certain he was an infamous serial killer. The second most intelligent person L had been working with was the police chief and he’d been making it clear for some time that no one should forget that he was still Light’s father.

“He is part of an organization that I’ve worked with on occasion before.” L had decided immediately upon deciding to bring in his successors that it would simply be the worst idea to make it known how deep his connection was to Wammy’s House. He had every intention of telling whatever lies were necessary to make it seem like Near was an impartial observer who had no strong connections to L, otherwise his opinion would be worthless in their eyes and it wouldn’t do anything to mitigate the suspicion towards him that was quickly overtaking the group.

”It is a group of talented individuals and geniuses in various fields that can provide unique insight and assistance in this case since my own cannot be trusted.” L said with annoyance. He despised being doubted in this way, especially since the people doubting him were nowhere near as intelligent or capable as he was.

“And we’re to believe this despite the fact that he is a *child?* ” Aizawa pressed, rehashing the same argument that he had been waging unsuccessfully since before Light and his father had shown up.

“Yes.” L said, simply. “I have been assured he is quite capable, despite his age.” In point of fact, L had never understood the importance that most of the world placed on age. Yes, while age played a large factor in most people’s development, L believed in judging individuals on that development rather than their age.

After all, he and many of the children at Wammy’s House developed differently from children their own age and were well capable of handling tasks seen as more adult at comparatively early ages. Aizawa’s distrust for Near’s abilities - while insubstantial - was expected, as many people didn’t see children as capable regardless of their accomplishments. L himself had experienced that quite a few times when he was younger and it was a large reason why he didn’t make his age known later in his career. He let people assume his age, whatever it was.

What did come as somewhat more of a surprise was their concern about having Near on the case at all regardless of his intelligence… because he was a child. Light thankfully missed Aizawa’s frustrating blowup when he showed up to find Near already there. The man's indignation had been almost apocalyptic and in one of the rare examples of Matsuda being useful, he managed to talk his senior down, albeit not as smoothly as their chief would’ve done.

Light's appearance had just barely missed that episode and L found himself grateful for it. He didn't want to have to deal with both men teaming up against him on this one.

"As you might be able to imagine, those with the capabilities to lead this case are few and far between. It's unfortunate, but we must accept those that have the ability, regardless of their age. Even if it bothers you, you must admit that there aren't any better options to turn to." L reasoned to them.

"What about Eraldo Coil and Danuve?" Aizawa questioned, crossing his arms. "Maybe you don't want to work with them because of your rivalry since they're recognized as the second and third best detectives in the world, but they would be our best bet rather than some kid."

"I've already reached out to both Coil and Danuve," Chief Yagami interjected, covering for him. "They've both rejected the requests, stating that they don't want to get involved."

"That's unfortunate." Matsuda stated the obvious, drooping a little.

Aizawa looked like he was about to start up another argument and L took an internal breath, ready for it, when Light surprisingly interjected.

“So what’s the plan, then? How do we get on with the case?” Light directed that question to L, but it was Near who answered.

“We need to keep an eye on Misa Amane.” The boy said calmly, fiddling curiously with the jacket around him, Light Yagami’s shadow still spilling over him. “For all we know, she could just be a crazy stalker or Kira fangirl, but the new information she’s brought to the case along with her previous actions makes her relevant. On top of that, I believe we need to get the case back on track as I think it’s gotten knocked off course.”

L tried not to let that last part rile him. He knew that Near was probably correct, but it rankled him that he may have let the case get away from its original path and veer off somewhere that was…simply unfortunate. It was an insult to his pride as an investigator that he wasn’t able to control how things have unfolded. Of the course, the blame for that was really…

A quick glance at a certain brunette and the thought remained unfinished.

At Near's words, most of the group looked stunned. Very little of what he said could be considered that shocking, so L deduced that it must've been the surprise of hearing a child be so thoughtful and sensible. Though with the individual IQs of most of the people in the room, L couldn't completely discount that they were really just that dull. At any rate, even Aizawa - for once - didn't seem angry with the suggestion. L tried not to let himself be annoyed by that either.

"Do you really think the case is that messed up?" Matsuda piped up meekly and once again proved to L that his intelligence topped out at the level of a goldfish.

"Of course it has!" Aizawa exclaimed, leaning forward in his seat. "This whole thing has gotten screwed up!" L wasn't very good with social situations, he knew that. Which was why he wasn't quite sure if he was imagining the undercurrent of blame towards L that he thought he heard in Aizawa's tone. Like he thought L was the entire reason the case had become so complicated. "I think the kid's right, one of the first things we should do is figure out what we're doing here!"

"So," Near said, drawing the conversation back to his side. "I think we can all agree that our purpose is to catch Kira, whatever the cost. Ordinarily, I would say that it is absurd for a previous suspect to be assisting on the case." He glanced at Light as he said this and Soichiro and Naomi stiffened noticeably. "But considering Ryuzaki is now a current suspect and he has made his desire not to leave the case completely known, I don't have a precedent for refusing to have Light Yagami on the case. Having said that, I think it's best if both have as little to do with the investigation as possible and that their actions in the investigation are always supervised."

"My son was already under 24 hour surveillance." Soichiro spoke up

instantly in his son's defense. "It turned up nothing and he's been cleared."

"But Ryuzaki hasn't." Near replied without hesitation. "And I don't mean that they should be supervised 24/7. Instead what I am proposing is that any actions they take in the name of the investigation should be overseen by at least one member of the team that isn't under suspicion. To that end, I think it would also be beneficial if they spent as much time as possible together."

Now it was L's turn to stiffen, his hand clenched tightly onto his knee where he was sitting in his usual position.

"I must object!" Soichiro lurched forward, raising his voice for the first time. "Having my son spend copious amounts of time with an older man, especially one that investigated him for murder is a bit—"

"Dad." Light called gently, putting his hand on his father's arm but the elder man was undeterred.

"We can try not to leave them alone together." Near offered, not sounding as if he cared one way or another.

"However, since one is a previous suspect and one is a current suspect and both should have little to do with the active investigation while also being supervised in their actions, it makes sense to have them be together most of the time, does it not? Besides, assuming that only one - if either - are guilty, then having one always with the other at the very least will mean that they can't get away with anything without the other seeing. It simply makes sense." Near glanced up at the Chief.

"Even so…" Soichiro grit his teeth, his eyes becoming shadowed.

“I can assure you that whatever you’re worried about won’t happen.” L felt the need to defend himself here. Light’s father was clearly coming as close as possible to implying L was a pervert who would prey on his son without outright stating it and while L didn’t feel the outrage that perhaps many other people would at the allegation, he still felt slighted by the ungrounded suspicion.

The surveillance had been strictly for the case and beyond that, he hadn’t done a thing to Light Yagami so he was feeling quite wronged by the older man’s suspicions of him.

At his defense of himself, Soichiro scanned L quickly with critical eyes but after a few seconds, he had the decency to look chagrined. “I’m sorry, Ryuzaki, but you have to understand, he’s my son.” The man told him.

“I do understand.” L consented. And he truly did. The man wanted to protect his son from any perceived threat, even if it was unlikely. He couldn’t afford to gamble the safety of his beloved oldest child.

“How about we ask Light what he thinks about it?” Near took that moment to intercede and his statement caused the eyes of the two men to zero in on the brunette.

Light gave them all a nervous smile, glancing down at the child he was practically wrapped around. “It’s alright, Dad. It’s for the case. It’s not even L’s idea, nothing’s gonna happen.”

“Light, I really think you need to think about this more before giving your answer.” Soichiro tried to dissuade his son.

“Dad, you’re worrying too much.” Light soothed him with a gentle smile. “Trust me a little. We’ll both be fine.” Soichiro’s eyes searched his son’s before his muscles subtly relaxed.

“In all likelihood, they will both be fine.” Near interjected. “If they’re both innocent, then they have nothing to fear and even if one of them is Kira, it wouldn’t be a good idea for them to hurt the other person under suspicion.”

“Um…that’s not really what the Chief was worried about—” Matsuda started, but Light cut him off by quickly raising a hand.

“The specific worry doesn’t need to be brought up!” Light spoke to him quickly before turning back to Near and smiling down at him indulgently. “That’s a good point, Near! I’m glad you agree my dad has nothing to worry about.”

“I don’t need you to patronize me.” Near glared up at Light, but the brunette remained undeterred.

“I’m not, I mean it. You’re the one thinking the most clearly out of all of us.” Light beamed down at his successor and it made chills run along L’s spine. What the fu—

“On the topic of Misa Amane.” Near apparently decided to change topics. “It would be best if we have two team members keep tabs on her…”

And so the conversation progressed with the team passing around ideas about who should do what with comparatively less fighting. It was only when the discussion began to wind down that Soichiro asked for something. “If it’s alright with everyone, could I have a moment to talk with Ryuzaki alone?”

The room fell silent as everyone glanced around nervously.

“That should be fine.” L said, deciding to bite the bullet.

“Should we leave to give you two some space?” Matsuda asked with concern.

“No, that’s fine. We’ll leave. We can take the room next door.” L answered, climbing out of his chair.

“We’ll try to be back quickly.” The Chief said, nodding to his men before silently following L out of the main room and into the room L picked out right next door. L had booked the three top floors of the hotel, so it wasn’t as if they had a lack of options to choose from to get some small amount of privacy. Small, since Watari had bugged all of the rooms on the floor they were using already.

“So what is it that has you concerned?” L asked without turning around to face him when he heard Soichiro close the door. He thought he knew what the Chief wanted to talk about so badly. It was probably bothering him for the last hour while they were hashing out the case.

“I need you to promise me that my son will be safe.” The man said without any preamble. L turned to look at him and found Soichiro staring him down steadily.

“I assure you that I have no intention of harming Light.” Which was entirely true. He had no desire to harm Light or see him hurt at all.

“I’m afraid I need your word on this, Ryuzaki. Light might not be concerned about it but I am. We both know that my son has… feelings…for you and…” Soichiro’s expression became complicated and he drew off.

“And you’re afraid I’m going to take advantage of that.” L said, a statement of fact.

Soichiro’s expression hardened and he nodded.

“I think you should trust in your son more. From what I’ve seen, Light has a good head on his shoulders.” L defended Light. Because it was true, Light did seem to know what he was doing very well for a man his age.

“I know he does, but I’m his father, it’s my job to protect him.” Soichiro asserted.

“I understand.” L muttered. Then - in a tone that hopefully conveyed how totally honest he was being in this moment - he said, “Then you have my word that I won’t intentionally hurt Light. I’m afraid I can’t promise not to do anything unintentionally, but I will try my best.”

Soichiro didn’t look entirely happy but he accepted L’s promise with a nod. Nothing in this situation would have made him entirely happy, L supposed, so this was the best they would get.

“Was there anything else you wanted to talk about before we go back?” L decided to ask.

There was a long pause before Soichiro gave a long sigh. Somewhat

unexpectedly, he asked, “Should we do something about the fact that my son has been huddling over your colleague like a mother bird over a nest?”

L blinked a few times in surprise before considering his answer. “I don’t think we can do anything. Light is very stubborn, after all.” L admitted and Soichiro nodded his agreement easily enough. “I don’t understand Light’s instantaneous attachment to him.” L added after a moment, puzzling over the same thing that had been throwing him all morning.

“Well, it’s probably due in part to Sayu.” Soichiro offered.

“Light’s sister?” L asked.

Soichiro nodded. “Light took to her the moment she was born, he was very excited to be an older brother. His mother always told me that he was eager to help with her when they were younger.”

“So Light has always liked children.” L concluded.

“That may be.” Soichiro nodded. “I think he got used to taking care of children with his younger sister. He used to walk her to and from her school before she got old enough to do it on her own. Even to this day, he helps her with her homework a lot. That boy Near probably reminds him of his sister.”

“I see.” L murmured, pondering on the relationship between the Yagami siblings.

Perhaps the same could be said for Aizawa and that is why the two of

them reacted so strongly to having Near on the case compared to the rest of the team. It was rare enough to have Aizawa and Light react anyway similarly, but in that context, it made some sense. Light had a younger sister and Aizawa had a young child.

At any rate, it was proving to be yet another headache for himself. This didn't bode well for the rest of the investigation if Light was hovering over one of his successors like a hawk. He hoped that Near's effectiveness wouldn't suffer too much from Light's hovering, but besides observing the situation and coming up with his own conclusions, L didn't expect Near to be able to do much with all the attention.

Thankfully, he had the other two working on their own, observing from a distance. Hopefully, their efforts will prove fruitful. Near was the one that L thought would integrate better into the group, Mello being far more excitable and antagonistic from the reports that L had received about him. Near was quiet and thoughtful, so L had thought he would do well in a group setting and not draw too much attention after his introduction.

Alongside his first two successors, Mello insisted that his friend Matt - also a high-performing child at Wammy's House - come along to assist. L had seen no problem with it, Matt had been evaluated as the third most promising child in the orphanage right after his first two successors.

Matt's proficiency with and preference for technology, alongside Mello's impulsive and hot-tempered nature made it necessary to have them hang back during this case while Near approached the group directly. While Light was distracted by Near's presence, he wouldn't expect two other investigators to be entering the case at a distance at the same time.

Hopefully this would be enough to pressure Light into revealing something because at this point, the Kira case wasn't just an

entertaining passion project for him to focus on for a while. No, it had gone well past that. Not only had Light quickly made their relationship far more personal, but L's reputation as an investigator had been put on the line and L was slowly becoming unsure if this case was even winnable.

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"A lot has changed since we last sat here." Light commented with a broad grin, glancing around the café where he and L were sitting. Light had been in a great mood ever since L agreed to go on another outing with him.

Light had suggested that they go back to the café that he'd taken him to before and L had agreed to it more easily this time. L reasoned to himself that if his successor was going to insist that he and Light spend more time together so that they could be watched better, what would it matter if they went to the café together again? And that's how they came to be here. Even still, L couldn't help hearing his previous conversation with Light's own father ringing in his ears as they sat in the café together. Almost as if Light could hear his thoughts—

"So am I allowed to know what you and my dad talked about after you guys stepped out of the room?" Light asked faux casually, a slice of apple tart hovering just in front of his lips.

"No." L deadpanned and - inexplicably - Light smiled in amusement.

"Boo." Light heckled him without any heat.

"Did we miss anything while we were gone?" L couldn't help but ask, unsure what else to talk about.

“Nothing much, just another argument between me and Mr. Aizawa.” Light said with a wry smile.

“You two can’t seem to go more than a few days without some kind of argument.” L found himself pointing out, curiously.

“Our record is three.” Light piped up with a bright smile. L couldn’t tell if he was legitimately proud of that fact or not.

“What were you two arguing about this time?” Because L wanted to hear what Light had to say about it. The fact that the room had video cameras and audio devices in it, and L could watch the footage any time he wanted was something he certainly wasn’t going to tell Light.

“Mr. Aizawa was going on about how he was still upset that you hadn’t left the case and that he didn’t know what you were thinking bringing Near in and I got angry at him. Partly because Near was right there and partly because I got sick of him bad mouthing you.” Light hummed, popping his treat into his mouth.

As was usually the case with Light, L didn’t know how to react. He placed his fork down on his plate - his strawberry shortcake laying momentarily forgotten - and stared at the table as he mustered up something to say. “May I ask why you insist on defending me even when the rest of the investigators are against me?” L asked. It was something he wanted to know and didn’t at the same time and it was a confusing combination of emotions. He didn’t completely understand either Light’s motivations or his own feelings about it.

Was it part of Light’s feelings for him? L couldn’t think of any other substantial reason why he did it. If Light was Kira, then he knew that L was innocent of being Kira, that wasn’t enough reason to defend him

on its own. After all, if Light wasn't so keen on coming to his aide, L would assume that that was the best part for him about this whole circumstance. He could have someone to conveniently blame for everything that he'd done and even if it wouldn't stick, he could get L out of the way for a while.

Light could probably even set his father up in the power vacuum that would result from it. If he did that, he would be all but completely safe from any reproach going forward. He would have his protective father leading the investigation, the other inspectors too respectful of him and his father to even consider his guilt, and his biggest detractor - L - completely kicked out of the investigation.

With his father as the police chief and public support for L waning, Light could even be successful in getting a restraining order against L so that he couldn't even be questioned in regards to the Kira case. L would have to wrack his brain for the most deceptive tricks he could think of in order to even get within 100 yards of Light Yagami.

The fact that none of this had come to pass and Light was actually defending him and seemed to be trying to keep him on the team was only believable as a result of Light's feelings for him. Strategically, it made no sense otherwise. L being blamed as Kira and kicked out should have been the best stroke of luck for him.

Light was quiet for a long moment and the two sat in silence, undisturbed by the need to fill the space quickly with words. "You know, I really do like you, L." Light said as he turned to him, the softest look in his golden brown eyes and with a smile that matched. The confession sat heavily between them.

It wasn't news, but there was something in the soft way Light spoke that gave it more weight in that moment.

Distantly, L realized that that may have been the first time that Light had used his real name instead of the pseudonym that he'd first given him. L should get upset at Light for using that name in public, where anyone could hear them.

"...Why?" He really, truly wanted to know what it was about him that Light liked so much. It wasn't as if he had expected his number one suspect to target him with unyielding affection. Light stayed quiet for a time and L took in the younger man's features.

"You're determined." Light said suddenly, nearly causing L to startle. Nearly. "It's hard not to respect that about you. You know what you want and you laser focus on it. You'll come up with a plan to make it happen, no matter what it is."

Light gazed off into the distance as he spoke, his features relaxed and his voice calm. He could almost see the brunette going over their past interactions in his head. L quietly watched him as the younger man continued on.

"You're really smart - smarter than me - and I like that. There aren't many people I've met before who can argue with me like you do. When we argue about something, you don't look at me like I'm the smartest person you've met and I've lost you. No, you treat me like I'm normal." Light let out a small laugh under his breath. "You're different from anyone I've ever met, you know that? Not in a bad way. No, no, not in a bad way. Just about everything you say and do is unique. You don't do anything by half. When you do something, you're all in and you demand the same from the people around you. There's no one else like you."

L didn't know if he should speak or not. The silence was stretching on and eventually a full minute had passed without Light speaking again. Just as L was toying with the idea of if he should say something and what he should say, Light quietly started again, sounding just as peaceful as before. "I think you're cute." Another pause. "I think your

habits are adorable. The way you sit in chairs, how you stuff your face full of sugar, your muttering. Your eyes are nice, very intense…just like the rest of you."

"I'm intense?" L found himself asking, for lack of anything better to respond with.

"Very." Light nodded, turning to look at him and giving him an affectionate smile.

"...and that doesn't bother you?" In L's experience, people tended not to like when others acted aggressively.

"No, I like that about you. There are plenty of agreeable people in the world, what's needed is more people like you." Light replied.

L felt something at that. He wasn't entirely sure what. "It truly doesn't bother you, even when I made you the focus of my investigation?"

Somewhat predictably, Light smiled in response to his question. "You see me. To most people, I'm above reproach because I'm nice, but you see the nuance there."

"You were too perfect, it was suspicious." L replied, quite reasonably.

Light turned more fully towards L, giving him a better view of his lips quirked up in amusement. "Do you think I'm perfect?"

Light hadn't said he was perfect. But L just did.

Oh…oh. The realization hit L like rushing water, starting low and rising quickly before submerging him, almost too fast for him to realize it was happening. And then he was reeling. Suddenly something clicked. At least one thing that he'd been feeling made sense.

He might be returning some of Light's feelings. Oh, hell.

"You give off quite the appearance of it." L found himself mumbling in reply, feeling almost numb as his mind turned this new idea around and around.

"It's only half intentional." Light joked slightly before turning away, unknowingly giving L some time to think.

L had indeed thought that Light was charming and pleasing before - albeit almost certainly a manipulative serial killer with supernatural powers - but that had been the extent of his conscious thought on the matter. When did he start feeling things for Light? Is that what this was? L supposed he wouldn't know, but in that moment, it somehow felt correct.

Somewhat echoing Light's words from earlier, he thought that Light was unique in just about every way. It almost didn't even feel like an exaggeration to say that the boy was almost otherworldly compared to the people around him. He moved through the world as if he were something separate, but when he sat next to L and smiled at him and told him he liked him, he felt only too human.

He was far more mature than most people his age. Actually, more mature than most people who were several decades older than himself. The majority of college students would be in a panic at being

suspected of murder, but he never once showed stress. If anything, he sometimes acted amused by it. It was one of the reasons L had become even more suspicious of Light, he didn't react the way L would expect an innocent person to. He didn't react the way L would expect a guilty person to, either.

He had a beautiful smile and a cunning mind.

"What do you want from me?" L couldn't say why he asked this, exactly. It was just that…Light had been pursuing L's affection with a sharp intensity and now that L thought he might have developed feelings for him in return, L was feeling off-center and disconcerted. He wanted to establish some kind of knowledge about the situation so that he could gain ground. If he could find out what Light wanted…

Light looked surprised about his question at first, but within a few seconds, his features smoothed out into deep contemplation. Light hummed and dragged out his answer for some time. "I'm not sure. I guess I want your love."

"I already broached the topic of being in a relationship." L felt the need to point out. Although L had mostly been testing when he'd said that way back then to see what Light's reaction would be, he was perfectly willing to follow through with it if he found Light's reaction satisfactory.

The fact that Light rejected the offer despite his apparent feelings for him was and remained strange to L's mind. Light should have grabbed the opportunity with both hands if his affection for L was genuine, as L had already mostly accepted it was.

"That wasn't love, though, so I didn't want it." Light responded, simply.

“What do you mean?” L asked, pressing his thumb to his lips. He genuinely wanted to know now.

“Well, you didn’t make the offer because you actually liked me, right? You were probably just trying to get closer to me for the investigation or something, right?” Light sent him a knowing look.

“…yes. That is exactly what I was doing.” L briefly considered hiding it, but quickly found it pointless. Light seemingly had the preternatural ability to tell when L was lying, at any rate.

“I know.” Light gave a small laugh. “That’s why I didn’t want it. We could date but you still wouldn’t love me and like I said before, I have no interest in a farce of a relationship.”

“And what if I can’t give you love?” L asked, curiously. Because he had never given anyone love, to his recollection. Not his parents, not his peers or his later disciples at Wammy’s House, not Wammy himself.

L’s world was made of calculation and observation, with the height of his excitement coming from when he solved cases. It was the only thing that entertained and engaged him in an otherwise boring and mundane world.

He wasn’t sure if he could give genuine love or affection to anyone or even pretend that he did. Whatever feelings he now realized he had started to harbor towards Light, they promised nothing about staying power or about real love; a topic more mysterious to L than anything else he’d observed. He’d never felt it, even towards his own parents before they’d abandoned him but then he suspected they’d never felt any love towards him either.

Light gazed off into space for a while, his eyes obviously seeing something beyond the café they were in. Then, “I believe you can.”

L was surprised by the response and was staggered for a reply for a minute. “How can you be sure?” Because even L didn’t know if he could. What would Light know about it?

“You know, you seem to view yourself as someone who doesn't feel anything ever, especially not love, but I don't think that's at all right. Despite how much *some people* like to think that of you.” For a second, a foul expression passed over Light’s face and then it was gone, cleared away like it had never been. L would never understand how Light did that.

“Everyone must feel *something* at some time, even if it isn't necessarily love. As much as you want to remove yourself from the deeply emotional part of being a human." Light gave him a wry smile. "As for why I'm convinced you are capable of loving someone specifically...well maybe I have more faith in that part of you than you do. It's not like you have to be capable of romantic attachments to be just as much of a person as anybody else or anything, but I don't think you can completely write it off yet. There’s so much more to you than even you know, I think. Things about yourself you haven’t discovered yet. Then again, just because you can love someone doesn’t mean you’ll ever love me.” The way Light observed that possibility so calmly that L was sure he would’ve choked on something if he had been eating.

“And that doesn’t bother you?” L asked, incredulous. Because surely it should. People have killed over such things. L would know, he’d seen it many times.

“Of course it does.” Light acknowledged, equally calmly. “But I’m still going to try, because I’m absolutely sure that there isn’t another

person in the world like you, L."

"The name 'L' is meant to be passed down." L hadn't intended on giving that information away, but he felt the strong urge to say something that would make Light take that statement back. Take it all back.

"The title could get passed down just fine," Light didn't show a hint of surprise or take a moment's pause at that information. "But they wouldn't be you. And it's you that I would miss, not whatever detective is masquerading under the same pseudonym. You're irreplaceable to me."

Light's tone had changed to something incredibly melancholic as he spoke and L found himself severely wanting to know what he was thinking about that made him sound that way. Alongside the feeling that Light knew him too well for how recently they'd made each other's acquaintance, L also felt singularly aware that he didn't know Light Yagami as well as he should have by now. He was used to knowing everything there was about a suspect a short time after beginning to investigate them and he hadn't put in half the effort with any others that he'd put into Light.

So why was Light Yagami still such a mystery?

Chapter End Notes

> So with L's recollections of how little he's cared about most things, I'm trying to channel both L's arguable sociopathy (arresting people without actually taking them to prison and instead torturing them and training children to the point and then past when one committed suicide isn't normal damnit) and Light's canon view of the world from the beginning of the series.
> It's a very gray, boring, predictable world from Light's perspective there and I can easily imagine L experiencing it the same way and getting involved with crime solving as a result of that…

Opportunities

Chapter Summary

Light just can't help making situations worse...

Chapter Notes

So this chapter is a little bit shorter than usual because the scenes I wanted in this chap weren't of a very long nature, but it's not too much shorter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light had to capitalize on this opportunity!!

It was almost everything he could've wanted and he didn't even have to do anything to get it! Near had - on his own - decided that Light and L should spend as much as possible together! Light put his pillow over his face and screamed into it in pure joy, muffling the sound so that he didn't scare the rest of his family. This was the best!

Ryuk watched with amusement as he floated beside the bed. "You're really happy about this, huh?" He chuckled.

"Yes, I am!" Light grinned as he let the pillow slide off his face. "It means I get more chances to be closer to him! I get more chances to get him to come around! Isn't that great??"

"Sure, sure." Ryuk agreed, easily. "You and your husband get more time to be together and I get to go along for the ride! You guys didn't really figure out anything else about the arrangement during the meeting yesterday. Probably because your dad was so upset about it. Weird though, last time they did this, you guys had already moved full-time into L's complex and gotten handcuffed together. It's strange that they brought up the idea but put off making an actual plan this time."

“I suppose so, but then again, I’ve changed so many things already. Dad’s a lot more protective this time around and Naomi’s alive and on my side…” Light drew off and then he jolted up with bright eyes and an excited grin. “Do you think L will break out the handcuffs again this time?”

“I think if he does, your father will kill him.” Ryuk replied instantly.

“Damn it, Dad…” Light muttered under his breath, slumping back on his bed.

“You can always have more time to do that kind of thing later on.” Ryuk grinned, madly. “But..uh, are you going to be happy with just being together while you and your dad are at the hotel? As it stands, you’re still coming back home every evening. You fine with that?”

“Of course not!” Light crowed. "Not in the least! No…I need to take advantage of this. Near gave me an opening, now I need to make the most of it.”

“And how are you gonna do that this time?” Ryuk looked at Light while hanging upside down.

“Well, considering the biggest barrier to spending all my time with L right now is my dad…I need to talk to him about it. Then maybe I can get a word in with Near.” Light voiced the thoughts that he’d been turning over since the meeting. “I don’t want to just be joined at the hip while we’re actively investigating, although that is nice. I want things to be like the way they were before.”

“Things *have* changed though.” Ryuk reminded him.

"...but this doesn't need to." Light murmured, a determined glint entering his eyes.

"Alright." Ryuk chuckled. "So you want to spend all of your days and nights together. How are you going to get your dad to agree to something like that when he looked like he wanted to gut L for even being in your personal space?"

"With cold, hard logic and a little begging." Light said, going down to help his mom with breakfast before his dad and sister came down.

~ ❶ ~

L had found himself in an unfortunate situation.

If he were honest with himself, he'd been in such a situation for a long time, but he wasn't particularly eager to be that honest. Instead, he preferred to believe that the situation had taken a steep nosedive only recently. Specifically, he wanted to put it down to his talk with Light the previous day and the uncomfortable realization that he might be returning some of Light's feelings.

What on Earth was he going to do now?

It was fine - if not uncomfortable - when Light had one-sided feelings for him, even if L's attempts to try to use that to his advantage in the case only ended up redounding upon him. Now that he thought that he might be feeling… *things* …he didn't know what his next step going forward was going to be. It was rare that he didn't know what to do. He usually had no difficulty coming up with alternative plans, but here…

The constant suspicion from all ends mixed with his successor's plan to have L and Light spend more time together? L fervently wished that he could have put off the realization of his maybe feelings until later - or never - because he didn't know how he was going to navigate through spending even more time with Light while being aware of it. At the same time, he didn't think it would go over well if he immediately tried to interfere with his successor's first orders after agreeing to take a step back from leadership. No, he didn't see that going over well at all.

The group had agreed - with no small amount of trepidation on the Chief's part and a surprising amount of resistance from Matsuda and Misora - that Light and L should stick together as much as possible if they were going to stay on with the investigation. Intellectually, L could understand why his successor had come to that conclusion. Near had a problem with either of them being involved in the investigation, being a current suspect and a past one, but since both of them refused to leave completely, he refused to back down on the stipulation that the both of them should be watched during the investigation.

If they wanted to keep their group limited to the few who were already involved so as to not risk bringing in anyone more untrustworthy, they didn't have the manpower to investigate the case and keep an eye on both L and Light separately so it made better uses of their resources to have the two together, especially since if one of them is innocent and one of them is guilty, the innocent party basically acts as an unofficial guard, limiting what the guilty party can get away with in their constant presence.

All of this was understood by L.

Absolutely.

Completely.

If it weren't for just one thing…

They. Already. Had. KIRA. Himself. On. The. Team!

Of that, L was absolutely sure. It had been a long time since he had this level of conviction about something. No, L was *sure.* The problem was that at this point, no one believed him. In truth, they'd never believed him about the Chief's son, but now after working with them and being officially ruled out as a suspect, he'd basically become the team's mascot! If anything, the team at large seemed more concerned with protecting *Light* from *L!* It was like the world had gone mad! Meanwhile, L was trying to figure out how to stay afloat.

L felt reasonably sure that all he needed to do was survive a while, just until Near was able to prove what L already knew. He was confident in the abilities of his successors and so he was certain that Near would soon come to the conclusion about the identity of Kira that L had. All he needed to do was wait until Near came to that conclusion and then managed to prove it, a feat even L hadn't managed to do alone.

All he had to do was wait a little while for that…but why was it that just surviving that little bit longer felt so incredibly difficult? It felt like every time L turned a corner, he hit another wall. And then there was Light, doing everything that he wasn't supposed to do and L was starting to like him for it. Shaking his head, L purposely turned his mind towards anything other than the golden eyed boy he had been thinking about all morning.

The plans for the other components of the investigation had been ironed out the previous day as well. First of all, it was agreed that Misora would continue to play her role as L to Amane. They were always open to getting more information from the young model if it appeared that she had more to give, but as it currently stood, it didn't

seem to any of the investigators as if Amane had any more insights. For all intents and purposes, it really did seem like all the information she got had been from online forums and social media sites.

Misora's main jobs were to make sure that that was really all she knew and to keep her busy for the moment. The team had discussed it at length and it had been decided that because of her previous stunt, she was too much of a liability to simply ignore her, even if they were now all quite sure that she couldn't be Kira. Near - being the newest member on the team and the only one besides Light to not have been involved in the operation to meet Amane in person - was especially wary of discounting her.

Regardless, they could all agree that it was a very big risk that Amane could decide to pull a similar stunt to the one she pulled with Sakura TV. They all agreed that no completely sane person would do something like what she did and given how excitable she was about the subject of Kira, she could do a repeat performance. Near argued that the simplest way to ensure that they kept her from doing anything else crazy would be to pacify her with occasional meetings with "L".

Aizawa had suggested that they just detain her for the stunt they had recorded her admitting to, but both Near and the Chief readily pointed out that they probably wouldn't be able to hold her long for that, especially not with her status as a celebrity. And if they arrested her using that as evidence, they'd lose the foothold they'd managed to gain with her. That would be it.

Misora agreed to her part in the charade, so it had been a done deal to keep the act going, at least until they either caught Kira or figured out something better to do. Misora had earned nothing but L's respect on a case before and she was doing the same now, she stepped up in any way that she could.

The team couldn't completely write off the idea that Amane might end

up being dangerous - especially given the stunt she pulled before and the possibility that she might find out that Misora wasn't actually either L or Kira - so they decided that Matsuda and Mogi would be her backup. They would be stationed nearby during each of their meetings, listening in and if the meetings should take a turn for the worse, they would get involved.

With that squared away, they had decided that everyone else should work actively on trying to identify Kira until further notice. Near specifically would look into the possibility of L being Kira and Watari would give them his full support.

L sighed, feeling more tired than he'd ever been since starting this case. He really hoped that nothing substantial happened in the case before Near proved Light was Kira, but given how the case had gone thus far, he didn't rate the probability of that very highly. His concern was still how to get through spending even more time with Light while trying to navigate the team's suspicion and his own emotional responses. At least he still had the night and early morning hours to himself to think.

~ ❶ ~

"You want to do what?!" Soichiro yelled, his voice a mixture of horror and shock.

Sayu jolted and looked in their direction from where she sat in front of the TV.

"I want Hideki and I to spend the rest of the time we have left in the investigation together. Barring, I suppose, when I attend my classes, but I'm sure someone can drive me to and from those." Light answered his father calmly, having completely expected the outburst.

“Light.” His dad sighed, putting his head in his hands. “Why?”

Light felt a pang of sympathy for his father. In this timeline or the last one, this case always put him through the ringer and this most certainly hadn’t been what he’d expected when Light had asked him to talk after breakfast.

Light forged on anyway. “Well, it makes sense, doesn’t it? Near was right when he pointed out that having me and Hideki on the team as past and current suspects - respectively - isn’t proper. You never would’ve allowed that if it were a different case you were working on.”

His dad’s uncomfortable expression in response to that said it all. “Then why aren’t you asking to leave the case?” His dad asked after a moment.

“Because Hideki won’t leave, no matter what.” Light responded easily, sidestepping the admission that the last thing he wanted to do was leave the case. “The conflict of interest will still be there, even if I leave.”

His dad nodded, thoughtfully. “That much is true, I suppose. He’s as dedicated to this case as the rest of us are.”

“More.” Light said with a big grin, before moving on. “I know that there was a pressure for us to move onto other aspects of the case and come back to this issue later and I know most of it was coming from you with help from the other investigators. I appreciate your concern, Dad, but I don’t want the case to suffer because of this.”

“Light…” His dad breathed out, his expression looking conflicted but

with no small amount of pride on his features.

I'm sorry, Dad, I'm not as virtuous as you're probably thinking right now, but I appreciate the sentiment, Light thought. "Dad, please understand that I don't want to take advantage of my position as your son to get away with things. If Near thinks it's important for me and Hideki to be watched, then I think we should be watched 24/7 or close to it. Otherwise, one of us could get away with something when we're off-duty, so to speak. Not that I believe either of us are guilty."

"I don't believe either of you are guilty, as well." His dad acknowledged with a sigh.

"Then there's no danger in us sticking together until everyone is satisfied." Light grinned.

His dad looked at him for a moment and then muttered. "I wouldn't say that."

"Hm?" Light tilted his head.

"It's nothing, son, just…" His dad cleared his throat and straightened his back. "If I agree to this, you need to maintain a certain distance from Ryuzaki."

"I feel like that defeats the purpose." Light pointed out.

"Not so much distance that you're nowhere near each other…just… there are certain lines that the two of you shouldn't cross when you're together." His dad put his hands on both of Light's shoulders and looked into his eyes. "Just…if I tell you at any point something you

shouldn't do when you both are alone, I want you to listen to me and do what I say, okay?"

Wow, he really is worried about me and L being left alone, Light realized. *He doesn't think L is Kira, but he clearly doesn't completely trust L's morality. Well, I can't fault him for that, but I doubt what he's worried about will happen, knowing him. L's not exactly a fiend.*

"Okay, Dad." Light said, after a moment. He didn't completely like it, but how could he not agree to at least this much when his dad was clearly struggling with this. Hopefully, his dad would keep his rules reasonable.

His dad sighed deeply, letting his shoulders sag. "Thank you, Light."

"Thanks to you too, Dad. For agreeing to it." Light beamed and his dad returned it with a slightly strained smile.

"Well, you better get ready to head over to the hotel later. When we get there, I'll find a good time to bring it up to Near." His dad turned and started towards the stairs to the second floor.

I won, Light mouthed at his sister with a victorious grin.

Tell me about it later, Sayu mouthed back.

Light gave a thumbs up before turning to his father's retreating back. "Do you have any rules in mind already?" Light called after him.

“Just one.” His dad said, stopping and looking over his shoulder with a steely look in his eyes. “If you’re staying the night, you and Ryuzaki are sleeping in separate beds.”

~ Ⓚ ~

“So just to be clear, you want Ryuzaki and yourself to be supervised completely for the duration of the case?” Near clarified, sitting on the floor surrounded by dolls that he had somehow gotten hold of.

“That’s right.” Light agreed, trying not to coo over the little boy detective playing with toys. It was a habit he’d retained when Light - as Chronos - had been watching over him and it looked much cuter when Near was so much smaller.

“And your reasoning is that it would be more helpful for the investigation to have a more formal plan in place that didn’t allow either you or Ryuzaki too much time to act while unobserved?” Near continued.

“Exactly.” Light gave a close-eyed smile.

“Light, neither you nor Ryuzaki have to do this! You’ve already been put under 24/7 surveillance once and Ryuzaki rarely leaves the hotel. You guys don’t need to put yourselves out like that, really.” Touta stood up, looking distressed.

Before Light could respond to him, Near interceded. “If I’m being honest, I like that idea far more than the alternative. Allowing Light and Ryuzaki to be left to their own devices when they aren’t actively investigating leaves far too many opportunities for either to subvert the investigation. It’s sloppy work.”

“But…Light was already fully investigated.” Touta pointed out again, his tone hesitant.

“And he was cleared. There was aboslutely no evidence of wrongdoing on his part and there never has been.” Aizawa pointed out, tone subdued but no less miffed. Like several of them, he didn’t like Light’s innocence being called into question a second time.

“Yes, so I heard. However, I would appreciate being able to do so again so that I can witness it for myself. As for Ryuzaki generally being inside our moving headquarters, he is by far capable enough to do a variety of things from within the building, especially with the technology at his disposal. I would welcome putting him specifically under stricter surveillance, since he has yet to be officially cleared, unlike Light.”

“I don’t disagree with Ryuzaki being watched more closely, either.” Aizawa huffed from where he was sitting with his arms crossed.

“So you’re agreeing to my son’s request?” His dad questioned the boy.

“Yes, I am.” Near stated before turning to look at Light again. “Although I must confess I am still more than a little confused about why Light chose to subject himself to this scrutiny a second time.”

“I’m dedicated to this case.” Light smiled, offering up no further information.

“…I suppose so.” Near said and allowed the issue to rest for the moment. “Watari has agreed to keep watch over Ryuzaki and Light, I’m sure that he will be fine with doing so more extensively than

planned. Ryuzaki, do you have any objections to Light's suggestion?"

L, who had been silently listening to the discussion going on for the last few minutes answered calmly but Light personally thought the expression on his face looked foul. "No, I have no objections at this time. I commend Light on his commitment."

He looks like he wants to kill me in my sleep, Light thought with a big grin.

"Then I have no reason to deny Light's request." Near concluded.

"Thank you, Near." Light smiled softly at him.

Near looked at him with wide eyes at the soft expression for a moment. "Then if there are no further objections," Near started, with Light shooting a look at Touta when he looked like he might be ready to speak again. "The decision is made."

"When would you want to begin?" Light's father asked.

To which Near naturally replied, "Immediately."

Light was pretty sure he caught L's eye twitching out of the corner of his eye.

~ Ⓚ ~

As soon as that discussion was over, Near wanted everyone to take a short break and then he wanted to give everyone their immediate tasks that he wanted them to work on. Everyone needed to get their marching orders, so to speak. L and Light being the odd ones out because they weren't supposed to have anything important to do in the investigation until Near and all of the investigators were satisfied with their innocence. Light could always find something to do with himself later, so he wasn't too annoyed by the idea of not having anything official to do.

Deciding to give L the smallest of breaks to cool off - and to avoid cornering the man too hard - Light decided to take a seat near the corner of the room so that he wasn't right next to L and there was a little distance between him and the rest of the group, who were arranged primarily around the table in the center of the room. There was a couch right against the wall and off to the side that suited his purpose perfectly.

From what he'd seen in the investigation so far, it seemed the couch's primary purpose was for people to power nap on it when they needed to, but for the moment, he sat down right in the middle of it to bide his time and strategize. To Light's surprise, Naomi and Touta plopped down on either side of him not a few seconds later, as if it were coordinated.

"Hello, Light. How are you holding up?" Naomi asked, looking at him.

"Hi, Naomi, Touta. Holding up about what?" Light greeted them.

"We know you feel a strong responsibility to the case and that's why you're subjecting yourself to twenty-four hour surveillance for the second time besides being cleared." Matsuda said, concern etched into his features.

“I found it impressive that you weren’t even mad the first time you found out they’d been watching you without your permission.” Naomi added, an uncomfortable look crossing her face as she mentioned the morally (and certainly legally) dubious act L had committed before she’d joined the case. Like the other officers in the room, everything about her training and career experience made her feel deeply uncomfortable with such behaviors, but she couldn’t very well dictate what they could do in the course of the investigation based on her morals alone.

For his part, Light found himself a little confused about when they’d came to that conclusion on his motives, but he wasn’t about to correct the misconception. “It’s no hardship. My privacy isn’t more important than the case and being near L isn’t a bad thing, either.”

“Still, you shouldn’t have to do it.” Naomi insisted, Touta nodding along with her. “You were already cleared.”

“Not by Near, though.” Light pointed out. “It’s natural that he doesn’t trust conclusions as much when he wasn’t around when they were drawn. And it’s like he said, having me on the case when I was ever a suspect is a conflict of interest in most cases. The fact that he’s allowing me and L to stay somewhat unofficially on it despite that is probably his way of making concessions. I don’t want to take advantage of that by getting off with only partial surveillance when it’s clear that Near feels that’s a half measure, too.”

Which was all mostly true, except a motivation he ascribed to Near that he wasn’t about to voice was that he was sure Near wasn’t actually too concerned with L being on the case still despite currently being a suspect. Light didn’t know much about Near and L’s relationship or how being his successor worked, but he could at least determine that Near was reasonably sure that L wasn’t Kira.

Near wasn’t the type of person to be swayed by emotions or expectations but even so, if L was Kira, there was no way he would’ve

brought someone capable onto the team to take his place and he could presume Near had come to the same conclusion. Regardless, having battled him himself, Light was sure that Near had something in place in case L really was Kira and tried to use his proximity to the case to mess with it. Light couldn't say what yet, but it would make sense if he did have something in mind for that.

Near probably didn't care at all whether L was still on the case unofficially or not. Not unless something happened that made him care, but Light didn't want L off the case either, so he had no intention of creating the circumstances for that, so keeping L on the case despite potential conflict wasn't really a concession he was making for the rest of the team. The reason Light didn't bring that up to either of his friends was that he was pretty sure they hadn't told any of the investigators that Near was actually L's successor.

No one had brought it up and he was damn sure that if Aizawa had caught wind of that particular conflict of interest - as if they didn't have enough already - it would have been explosive. Aizawa was by far the most suspicious of L and he would likely see L appointing his successor as his replacement as an effort to further corrupt the investigation. After all, he'd probably see Near as someone who was definitively on L's side after hearing that. Someone who would cover for his misdeeds and look the other way.

Light would have a hard time blaming him too, because if he didn't know that, a) L is innocent, and b) Near is actually less attached to L's innocence than most people would guess, he might think the same thing. The few times that Near had brought up L in Light's presence in the past, he hadn't felt as connected to the man as one would expect a successor to be. In fact, at times he was critical of L or L's process, feeling fiercely independent from his predecessor until the end. No, Light wouldn't label him as the type to cover for L.

Since he was very sure that they hadn't informed the group of L and Near's connection before this case, Light didn't want to blow the lid on that. Partially because he wanted to keep the secret for L and partially because he hadn't yet worked out how he would explain how

he knew about it to the group yet. The inevitable question that would pop up the second he made the claim.

"You're one of the best investigators I've ever met, Light." Touta breathed out in awe, jerking Light from his thoughts. "You're always so responsible."

"You'll be a great detective one day, Light." Naomi added.

"Ah…" Touta looked uncomfortable at that comment, like he was thinking if he should say something.

"I guess." Light said noncommittally. Some of his feelings must have shown on his face because Naomi spoke again.

"You don't think so?" She asked him.

"I don't desire so." Light said with wry humor.

"Oh. I see." Naomi did seem to understand quickly and accept it, given she didn't ask any more questions about it, although she did look confused.

"You seem very fond of Near." Touta moved on. "Why do you like him so much?"

"What can I say? He's a cute kid." Light said, shrugging his shoulders like it wasn't anything important. "I'm still not entirely happy with someone his age on the case, but I have to admit he is smart and he's

so small that I can't help but be protective of him."

"You're a protective person in general. I could tell that an hour after meeting you." Naomi smiled softly at him, warmth shining in her eyes. "I admit I'm not altogether happy with someone so young being involved in the Kira Case, either. Even if Kira is just sticking to criminals now, there's no telling if they'll become dangerous if pushed too far. Kids don't belong in an environment like this."

"I can't imagine anyone's very happy with it, even if we're all accepting it for the time being. We each have our own reservations about it." Touta contributed.

"Most of the people here probably thought I was too young to be involved in the case, too." Light said, not really trying to make a point so much as just putting the fact out there.

"And you probably are, despite your clear intelligence." Naomi smiled at him. "But you were at least in high school and now you're in college. I don't even know how old Near is, but he looks nine or ten." The observation made her lips tug into another frown.

"I don't believe L would've brought Near on this case if there wasn't a good reason." Touta jumped in to say. "He doesn't do anything without a reason."

"I agree." Light grinned at him, mentally dubbing the both of them the L Defense Squad. "I don't believe L is Kira and I won't believe it until proven otherwise, so we have to believe in him and his decisions. He must've thought that Near was the perfect person to lead the team in his place and from what I've seen so far, Near is startingly intelligent for his age. And he seems to be thinking clearly and impartially too."

“So we just need to keep the faith until we see the investigation through?” Naomi’s tone didn’t sound convinced, but she had an amused smile that said that she might not be so unwilling to try.

“That’s right.” Light smiled. “The case stalling wasn’t his fault. I don’t think any of us would have been able to do any better, myself included. I think a little bit of trust would be what he and the case needs right now.”

Unseen by the two investigators flanking him, Light’s smile gained a sharper edge when he spoke his last words. “After all, no investigation can survive without support.”

~ ⓚ ~

Mello was pretty irritated. This hadn’t been what he’d expected when he and Near were told that L wanted them to come work with him on the Kira Case in Japan!

At first, he’d been so excited. It was his dream to work with L! To show the man that his life had revolved around since he was little that he was capable of succeeding him. Although he’d been a little annoyed that Near was being given the opportunity too, he could understand it. Near always beat him out on the tests they were given, so it made sense that he was being invited, even if Mello was annoyed that the little jerk might overshow him here, too.

Mello had shaken it off though and told himself that he wouldn’t let that happen. He *would* make good on this opportunity, no matter what! He would prove to L that he was the better successor by clearing his name and helping to catch Kira!

…at least, that was what he’d thought until they came over and were

given their roles for the investigation. That was when Mello found out that Near was the one who would be the face of the investigation, being the only one that got to sit in on the meetings in person and who was going to lead the Japanese investigators as L stepped back.

What fresh crap was that?!

Hell, most of the investigators - as well as the prime suspect - didn't even know Mello and Matt were there! Matt hadn't originally been invited, but Mello had insisted that he come. Mello needed the backup if he was going to go against Kira and Near at the same time. He needed someone he knew would be on his side and his lifelong friend was the only one he could trust.

He was even happier now that he had his friend by his side considering he was getting the shaft in this investigation. *Observe from a distance,* Mello had been told. *Make note of any blind spots in the investigation,* L had said. While Mello was relegated to the shadows and a useless support role, Near got to bask in the investigative light that should be his! How was he ever going to prove himself this way?

"You're thinking too hard again." Matt spoke up from where he was sitting, playing on his handheld game system. His friend didn't even glance up from his game as he spoke. He didn't need to; he knew Mello better than anybody else, except for Roger.

"This is my future! There's no limit to how hard I can think about this." Mello seethed. He shoved his hand inside his backpack and fumbled around blindly inside it until he got ahold of one of his chocolate bars, quickly ripping it open and biting into it. He loved the taste of chocolate and it was the only thing he'd ever come across that could help him calm down as much as it did.

"It's not like this is such a bad deal, though. You still get to prove

yourself or whatever." Matt responded, his tone bored. He may have had to sit through more than one rant on that topic from his friend. "Even if you don't get to be at the forefront like Near, you can still be more than helpful to the investigation."

"That won't be enough." Mello snarled as he gnawed on his chocolate. "I'm going to get overshadowed by him again at this rate."

"So what do you plan to do about it then? Just sit here on the cameras and complain?" Matt asked.

Mello was quiet for a few minutes, listening to the sounds of Matt's game as he thought over the question. He could just play his role in the investigation and he would receive praise for it, but Near would still be the one everyone saw. Near didn't complain once when Roger told them that they would both be helping L with this case, but why would he? He'd always been able to beat out Mello no matter how much the older boy tried, so of course Near wouldn't care if they were sharing the Kira case.

And such thinking was proven correct when Near was given the honor of a leadership role while Mello was relegated to researching and monitoring from behind the scenes. Meanwhile, L was still treating them like a matched set and Mello didn't want to be that. He wanted to be seen for his own merits, as better than Near for once.

He couldn't do that if he just did as he was told on this investigation, Mello concluded. He had to break out of the mold and show everyone that he had the intellect and the instincts of an amazing detective and the one thing that Near would never have: the drive to *act.* L wouldn't take kindly to him going AWOL, so Mello decided that he would continue with the task he was assigned on the surface, while secretly doing more for his own investigation.

He would stage his own investigation and uncover Kira on his own and thus, he would finally prove to L who really deserved to be his successor. His only successor.

Chapter End Notes

What a tangled web we weave…

Lazy Mornings

Chapter Summary

> Light enjoys L for a little bit, but the cogs in the machine won't stop turning for anybody.
>
> The last part of the title is not a dirty joke, I swear, I know how it sounds.

Chapter Notes

> This one took a while to write (so many ideas, so many revisions...the horror...), so I was in a bit of a rush with editing. Hopefully, there are no major mistakes that I missed~ 😅

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The previous night's sleep was the best he could remember having in years. The clicking of the keys of L's keyboard as he typed had almost been like a lullaby, reminding him of a time passed. There was something very comforting about having L in the room with him, even if they weren't sharing a bed. He was a comforting presence he hadn't known he needed until he had it.

Light accidentally slept late into the morning and when he woke up, his soul felt at peace. He didn't know if he had ever woken up with such a sense of utter calm. *Maybe being with L is like finding enlightenment,* Light joked to himself.

Given how little the man slept when they knew each other before, Light wasn't in the least surprised that L was working on his computer when he'd gone to sleep and was doing it again when he woke up. Light rolled onto his side lazily and with a peaceful smile on his face, he watched L work. He was enjoying the lazy morning immensely, but unfortunately L didn't let him enjoy it in peace for long.

Just over a minute after he rolled onto his side to watch L, L's fingers suddenly paused on the keyboard. "I see you're awake, Light." L stated

without looking away from his computer, despite the fact that he'd stopped typing for the moment.

"Morning, L." Light smiled brightly at him.

"...I see you're calling me by that name now." L commented.

Yes, he supposed he was. Not that Light didn't like the cute little name "Hideki", but his desire to be closer to L emotionally made it difficult to want to carry on with that farce. Besides, they both knew that Kira knew who L was, so there were two levels to the farce that had lost its meaning a long time ago. "It's not too big a deal if I call you that when it's just us, right?"

"You realize that there are cameras and listening devices in this room, right? It's never just us." L reminded him.

"You know what I mean." Light rolled his eyes, keeping his smile. "No one who's watching us is going to care, are they?"

"I suppose not. You can do it as long as we're inside the building. Though, I'd like to ask that you continue to call me by either Hideki or Ryuzaki when outside." L responded after a minute. So L was going to continue with the partial act that someone else besides Light could be Kira, huh? As if anyone of any importance in this case didn't already know his real identity. Light was growing just a little tired of this particular game.

"So do we have anything to do today?" Light asked. Alongside being his first night sleeping over, it was also the weekend, so Light didn't have to go to class that day. Neither did L, not that the man cared about that. What he was more interested in was whether they had any actual work to do.

“As far as I know, nothing. Near informed me that he’d let us know if there was something he felt was safe for us to do.” L answered. Light suspected that he and L both knew how unlikely such a task would be in an investigation where they were suspects. “Although he did take the time to inform me this morning that they’ve just gotten word of another suspected Kira killing. Two of them this time. They’re currently looking into the two deaths to see if there was a reason they were killed simultaneously.”

Yeah, sorry about that, Light grinned internally. The night before asking his father to consent to him sticking with L, he’d asked Ryuk to take over writing down names for the time being. He’d worked ahead plenty in the notebook, but Ryuk would be helpful for new crimes that he couldn’t write ahead, especially since he was thoroughly investigating all his targets this time.

Actually, even though I don’t want to be a detective anymore, it might be fun to beat L at his own game just a little. Maybe I can use my down time to help him solve some other crimes, Light considered.

“Well then, I have a suggestion. Since we’re supposed to keep our mitts off the active investigation for a while, why don’t we entertain ourselves with investigating other crimes? Non Kira-related ones?” Light offered, a lazy smile stretching across his face. “Doesn’t that sound like fun?” L got a look at his face at Light’s suggestion and his eyes got a critical look in them as he looked at Light.

“Well, go ahead. Tell me what you’re thinking. I can tell you have something on your mind.” Light said, calmly.

“Are you trying to distract me from investigating Kira with this?” L asked him.

Somewhat surprised by how straightforward the man was being, Light responded easily. “Well, kind of. Like I said, you’re not supposed to be working on it. I don’t think Near would appreciate you stepping on his toes like that and the team definitely would feel it’s a breach of the agreement. In that way, I’m trying to distract you. If you’re asking though if I’m trying to interfere with the investigation, then no. That’s the exact opposite of what I’m trying to do.”

Light kept his own response direct and clear of anything that L could twist into an admission of wrongdoing. He expected that at least part of the reason L asked was because he knew that they were being constantly recorded and that Near was going to be going over the footage carefully. The idea might have a tinge of desperation to it, but L might have wanted to see if Light would admit to trying to get L off the investigation in a way that he could make sound shady.

Which, fair enough, Light was shady, but that kind of thing was just petty. Well, to L’s credit, the man really did never give up.

Light thought back to the previous night before they’d gone to bed. He’d wanted to talk with Ryuk a little bit so he quietly opened his journal, his signal to Ryuk, and started scrawling in their code. He knew L noticed but the man didn’t ask what he was doing and Light wasn’t eager to make excuses, either.

"Hey, Ryuk?" Light scrawled in code in his notebook.

"Yeah? What's up?" Ryuk asked, swirling around him.

"I've started getting this feeling that something's being kept from me. There's something in this case that I don't know about."

"Why do you think that? I haven't noticed anything." Ryuk glanced at him.

"You know, the more I think about it, it's strange that Near came here by himself, especially given that L has acknowledged that he can't beat me on his own. Last time, Near had a whole squad. Did L really have his child successor come here with no backup?"

"I guess you have a point." Ryuk rumbled. "But are you sure L isn't just taking a gamble on the fact that you won't hurt Near? L has acknowledged that Kira only kills criminals so far, so maybe he thinks it's safe enough for Near."

"That still doesn't explain why Near came alone to catch me. The whole team here is pretty well compromised and L damn well knows that. Besides, L is never this straightforward. What am I not seeing?"

"What do you want me to do?" Ryuk hung upside down as he read Light's notes.

"I can't move freely because of the case and especially with me and L being around each other all the time. I need you to look into it. But," Light paused here before continuing to write. *"If there was something going on right in the hotel, you'd probably know about it. Instead, I want you to follow Watari and watch everything he does on his computer."*

"His computer?" Ryuk questioned, cocking his head to the side.

"L trusts Watari implicitly. If there's something going on, Watari will communicate it at some point when he thinks he's alone. If there's a plan or another person here, he'll communicate it at some point. Just keep an eye on him." Light wrote.

"I can do that!" Ryuk agreed excitedly. "I'll keep an eye on the old guy. Are you going to just lounge with your boyfriend while I'm doing that?"

"Well, I think I've earned a bit of time together." Light wrote. *"But…if I'm lucky, I might be able to distract him from the case a little. He's supposed to be hands off, but if there is something going on, it'll be easier to deal with it if his attention is divided with something else."*

Ryuk grinned manically. "Good luck with 'distracting' him then! I'll come back when I have some info!"

*“And have you made any progress with that **other thing** ?”* Light asked him.

“Not yet!” Ryuk answered. “I’ve been asking around the Shinigami Realm, but so far no one’s heard of anything like this happening, just like me!”

“Are you out of leads?” Light asked, anxious.

“I still have a few more Shinigami I can ask about it. The last few are a bit higher up on the food chain, so I’ve been avoiding them, but…”

“Are they willing to talk to you?” Light asked.

“Don’t know! Guess I’ll find out eventually. Case first, though?” Ryuk cackled.

“Yeah, case first.” Light wrote. *"And don't forget! I can't give you apples while I'm here!"*

"No big deal! There's a grocery store I can steal from down the street! See ya, Light-o!" And before Light could write anything more, the Shinigami swooped out of the room through the wall and left Light and L alone for the night. Not that anything much happened with L mostly trying to pretend Light wasn’t there.

Light shook his head as he came back to the moment. “So what do you say, wanna investigate together?” Light cocked his head to the side, giving L a smile.

L considered for a moment, but then finally nodded his assent. “You are right that neither of us are supposed to be involving ourselves in the investigation for the time being. Your suggestion may be more productive.”

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’!” Light crowed, rolling onto his back and flopping his arm across his face.

~ ❶ ~

L hadn’t slept for one second all night. He’d been completely miserable and on edge. Not like Light, who appeared to sleep like a log all night.

That in itself wasn’t unusual, since L didn’t sleep much most nights and could go several days with only a few collective hours of sleep. What was more unusual was that L had barely managed to get any work done all night. Usually he stayed up working, but more often

than not that night he had found himself staring blankly at his computer screen, listening to Light shifting in his sleep in the bed next to him.

Each time he realized it, he tried once again to shut the sound out and focus on his work, but it was never long before he found himself distracted by it once more. It felt to him almost like every slight sound Light made in his sleep were magnified. He was being sensitive to Light's presence in the room, he could recognize that and he couldn't think of anything other than his problematic relationship with Light as the cause.

After all, members of their team had been staying to work overnight with L since they had met up, sometimes sleeping on the couch he'd had put in the room. It's not as if this were the first time that he'd spent the night with others. And yet this guy was driving him crazy and all he was doing was sleeping.

As if that wasn't bad enough, something odd and currently unexplainable that L noticed as the nights came and went is that in the mornings, when Light was often groggy, the boy would move strangely. That is, when he was awake but not awake enough, he would jerk towards L when the man moved away, his arm in particular jerking in his direction. It was incredibly strange and L simply had no clue about why he was doing it.

As much as he wanted to ask Light directly about it to assuage his curiosity, Light truly didn't seem to realize he was even doing it. If he did, he was doing a great job at pretending to be oblivious of it. That - in and of itself - was fascinating to L. He would need to watch Light more to have a chance at identifying the reason for the strange behavior.

"So we're not supposed to work on the case. Would it still be too much of a conflict if we got to say hi to the team every day?" Light turned to him again and asked at one point.

“I’m sure it wouldn’t be too out of the question, especially since you’re related to one of them.” L answered.

“Oh, well I do think it would be nice to see my dad and let him know I’m doing alright, but I was more thinking of seeing Near and Touta. Touta has been especially worried about me.” Light said, thoughtfully.

L felt his lips tugged downward as the now-familiar foul feeling swelled in him at the mention of that idiot. “ *Mr. Matsuda* is an adult. I’m sure he’ll be fine if you didn’t let him know you haven’t been harmed for a day or so.”

Light gave him a look with his eyebrows raised, but he didn’t look particularly surprised at L’s comment. “He’s a good friend to me, I don’t want him to worry unnecessarily, whatever you might think. And Near, too, is a sweet kid. I want to check in with him and make sure he’s doing alright, although I might envy him a little for still getting to hunt Kira while we’ve been sidelined.”

“Are you sure you aren’t jealous of the control Near has over the investigation?” L needled him.

"You're one to talk about jealousy." Light snapped right back at him.

Almost immediately, L's own brows furrowed in confusion. "And what is that supposed to mean, pray tell?"

Light visibly looked like he was debating pointing something out, but instead all he did was send L an annoyed look. "Never mind. It doesn’t matter." He pointedly glanced away.

L was quite certain that he had just missed some piece of subtext. Whatever it was, he was sure he didn't like it. "Are you agreeing that you could be jealous of Near?" He needled further.

Light huffed out a breath. "I think it's mentally impossible for me to be jealous of Near for anything." He said, his tone firm.

"And why is that?" L found himself curious.

"Because he's just a small kid." Light looked at him incredulously, eyebrows raised in question. "It's unreasonable to be jealous of anything with him. Instead, I'm happy if he's happy."

"Happy if he's happy…" L muttered, uncertain.

"Yeah, being happy if someone you care about is happy is a key thing about love." Light responded, his family and - unwillingly - Misa flashing through his mind. They were the people that he'd received unconditional love from.

"I don't believe that's the way it normally goes." L argued, mildly. "I've encountered many cases where someone kills their lover."

Light paused. "Let me rephrase," He said. " *Healthy* love revolves around caring about someone, even if it doesn't give you anything to do so. Like wishing for the happiness of someone you used to date even after you've broken up. Obviously, there are ways that love can turn out much more toxic, but I guess I don't really see that as real love."

L considered that. “So for you, that is the difference between what you consider real and fake love? The ability to care selflessly?”

Light furrowed his brows a little as he thought. The expression was… “I guess that’s right. Fake love probably isn’t the right term though… maybe selfish love? The kind of love that’s like a dark, twisted inverse of what real love *should* be. Maybe I just can’t see love as real if you can just choose to cut it off in an instant.” Light looked away, a complicated expression crossing his face. L desperately wanted to know what he was thinking right then.

And what if that’s the only kind of love you’ve ever seen? L wondered to himself, but didn’t fancy voicing that vulnerability to Light. Maybe Light was capable of selfless love, but L knew he was a childish, selfish person.

He wished Light would wake up and see that, too.

~ ❶ ~

“Good afternoon, L. Where’s Light?” Misora greeted him as she sat down across the table from him in one of the investigation rooms.

“He’s currently with Near at the moment. Light wanted to visit with him and Near is taking the opportunity to ask him some questions about his experiences in the case.” L answered.

“Aren’t you two supposed to be practically chained together?” She asked with a slight smile.

“Not as such,” L considered seriously. “We are supposed to spend the

majority of our time together and individually, we are supposed to be under surveillance so that we cannot interfere with the case until we are cleared by Near."

"Oh, that makes sense." Misora cleared her throat. "Is there a reason you wanted to talk to me privately?" She paused, shifting uncomfortably in her chair. "...I don't mean to be rude, but we both know you're not supposed to be involved, so if you're going to ask me to act on your behalf, I…"

"It's alright." L interrupted her. "I understand that you wouldn't wish to do something like that which might subvert the case. Besides, I wasn't going to ask you to do so."

"Oh, I'm sorry about coming to that conclusion, then." Misora responded with some embarrassment, but the tension nonetheless left her shoulders. "I've had a lot on my mind alongside the big changes in the case."

"How is your fiance doing, if I may ask?" L asked, taking a sip from his cup of tea and then setting it back down on the table. Misora kept hold of hers. The last time he had seen her fiance, he had been interviewing the man on his experience being kidnapped and he had certainly given off the impression at the time that he needed therapy following the incident.

"He's been doing very well, lately." Misora's expression brightened noticeably at the mention of her fiance. "He's been moving around the apartment more rather than spending all day in bed or staring off into space. I've been coming home to dinner lately, one of the things he's been trying his hand at now that he's home all the time. We even finally went to go see my parents together and his first meeting with them went well."

“So would you say that you believe he’s recovered mentally from his ordeal?” L inquired.

“I don’t think he’s completely recovered from what happened yet, but I do think he’s come a long way. It felt like he was struggling for a long time and I didn’t know how to help him, but now…” She smiled, her eyes briefly gazing off into the distance over L’s shoulder. “It feels strange to say, but things feel like they’re better between us than they’ve been in a long time. I thought I was happy before, but I feel so much stronger now.”

“I see.” L murmured gazing at her, not really understanding what she was saying at all. This was the part of people’s feelings that was far less concrete and understandable to the detective. In Misora’s case, he wished she would be more concrete with what she was saying, instead of all the poetry and fluff she seemed to be wrapping her thoughts in.

It was similar to when L tried to wrap his mind around the intricacies of why individuals killed for love or jealousy. He understood well enough that people can and did do so and that it was a very common motive for murder, alongside rage and money, but if one were to ask him why he thought love or jealousy were enough reason for those people to commit murder, he wouldn’t be able to say why.

He had never been in love before and he was certain that if he had, it still wouldn’t have mattered enough to him to kill over if that person left him for another. Why anyone would go so crazy over another individual to be driven to murder completely baffled him. How another person could be so important to someone simply didn’t make sense.

He could understand other attachments to an extent, like a parent’s with their children, but even that bond wasn’t always consistent. After all, he’d encountered many cases of child abuse and neglect while investigating related cases.

And it wasn't as if his own parents ever loved him, either.

"Am I to take it, then, that your relationship has improved as a result of your fiance's kidnapping?" L hazarded a guess.

"I wouldn't say that." Misora frowned. She looked displeased and like she was contemplating saying something. Slowly, she said, "I still wish he hadn't gone through that experience, but we've risen above it. I… there were moments when I worried that it might break him. That he might never recover from it. It seemed like he was suffering and I didn't know how to help. And then one day, he seemed more alive than he'd been lately. More in the moment. And we had a real talk that night like we've never had before. Do you know why I'm telling you this?"

L didn't. "I don't."

"It's because the person I credit for all the good that's happened recently is Light." Naomi said straightforwardly. "Everything from my fiance being rescued to Raye's recovery. I credit Light with all of it. I understand that you've always harbored suspicions about him, but in my eyes, Light is a good person. He's not the kind of person that would kill people."

"…I take it from your statement that you have a great deal of trust for Light." L stated.

"I do. I wouldn't have gotten this far without him. You remember that I wasn't able to see anyone in the investigation when I went to the police station, don't you? It was only him stepping up for me that got my foot in the door. He had the connections to help me, but he was also the only one who believed in me when nobody else did. I owe

him all that and then he went a step further by walking me to the hotel himself to protect me until I could see you. He's a good kid, better than most. If only he wanted to be a police officer, he would be among the very best…"

"I understand how much you feel you owe him." And this time, L did understand. Although this is not his first time encountering this information, this was perhaps the first time that he became aware of just how significant they were to her.

Before, he had interrogated the occurrences only in the context of what it meant for his theory that Light was Kira. If it harmed the theory, if his actions were truly innocent, or if they were all calculated to achieve some end. He hadn't truly considered them before in the context of how she would have felt.

She must have been truly desperate at the time, L concluded. *She had important information that she couldn't share with just anyone, but she also wasn't being allowed to see the investigators on the Kira Case and didn't know when or if she could see them. And then Light comes in like an angel and reaches out to her.*

I admit, even I stumbled when I realized that Light had known Misora's real name before she arrived here and still escorted her safely to the hotel. However, he could've easily done it as a bid to project his own innocence, or he could've done it despite wanting to kill her because likely by that point, the investigators already knew that he had come into contact with her. If she'd gone missing after that, he would've been the first suspected.

He could prove nothing of Light's previous motives, though. Light could either have been Kira acting on a secret plan or the kind hearted son of the police chief trying to help someone. He could prove nothing, one way or the other. What mattered to Misora wasn't unproven theories, but instead what happened in actuality, which was that Light was the person who reached out to her, believed in her and protected her. L could understand if she even believed that she owed

her life and the life of her fiance to Light.

Unless I get irrefutable evidence that Light and Kira are one and the same, I don't think I'll ever be able to turn her against Light, L realized. He was in an unfortunate situation where the entirety of the investigative group besides Near were on Light's side - and Light was clearly trying to change that, as well. Even the members that were the most supportive of L - the Police Chief, Ms. Misora, and Matsuda - had still made it clear that they were on Light's side more than anything. It was just that they believed in both Light and L's innocence.

"Is Light the real reason you wanted to talk?" Misora asked, perceptively.

"That may be the case." L allowed. He debated on what he was going to say next, but he didn't have many people to discuss his thoughts with and he continued to come back to the thought that he respected Misora's intelligence from their previous case together. In addition, she had a fiance and he was getting sick of turning the problem of Light Yagami around and around in his head endlessly.

"I find myself at a loss of how to treat Light when we aren't in the roles of investigator and suspect." He admitted, finally. He and Light have only spent one night and the following morning nearby each other and L was already struggling with how to act. Light bringing up the idea of working on cases together only exacerbated his discomfort regarding their roles now.

In L's mind, he still saw himself as the investigator and Light as definitely Kira, but officially, they were neither. If they investigated other cases together, that would effectively make them partners, even if only for a time.

"Oh." Misora looked surprised at L's admission but to her credit, she

moved on quickly. “Well…have you thought about taking this opportunity to explore how you and Light work together *without* the pressure of the case?” She asked, hesitantly.

L’s brain stalled for a moment. “What do you mean?” He asked.

“I can’t believe I’m encouraging this, but…” Misora closed her eyes and muttered under her breath before raising her voice as she looked back to him. “I think we can all agree even if it’s somewhat uncomfortable to bring up in the group that you and Light’s relationship has been…complicated well before this. Maybe now is the time to explore those complications and figure out where the two of you stand without the specter of Kira in the background. Where the both of you will stand once this case is over.”

When the case is over, we will stand as successful investigator and convicted criminal. There’s nothing to wonder about with that, L thought to himself but knew he would only get arguments if he said it aloud to Misora who clearly favored Light. Instead, he settled on something else in her advice that piqued his interest. “What do you mean when you say we should explore the complications in our ‘relationship’?”

Misora’s gaze was more steady and calm now as she returned his gaze. “Don’t pretend like you don’t know about Light’s feelings for you.”

"I am well aware of Light's crush on me by now, thank you." L waved her off, irritated at her bringing it up. “I know about his ‘feelings’, such as they are.”

"And how do you feel about Light?" Misora returned without hesitation.

This caused both L's mind and body to pause. How he felt about

Light? So that was where she was going with this.

"What do you mean?" L asked in a reserved manner, his habit of gathering information about a situation before anything else kicking in. The conversation was entering dangerous territory.

“You said you were well aware of Light’s feelings. What about your own? Are you well aware of that, as well?” Misora inquired, calmly.

“You’ll forgive me for saying so, but my feelings are hardly any of your business.” L attempted to shut her down. No one had any business peeking into his personal affairs, especially since such a thing usually resulted in a threat to his safety.

“Considering you started this conversation about how you and Light were going to be around each other from now on, I’d say it is.” Misora stood her ground, not backing off even an inch at L’s rebuke.

He could always respect that about her, her tenacity. And the argument was sound, even if he didn’t like it. “I don’t have feelings for Light.” L lied easily. Whatever realizations he might have had, he wouldn’t be sharing that vulnerability with anyone else.

“You say that…” Misora looked like she was going to trail off, but after a second, she continued anyway. “But you treat him differently from everyone else on the team.”

“He’s a suspect.” L reasoned to her.

“I thought he was cleared.” She shot back in a wry but unsurprised tone. L didn’t have anything to say to that so after allowing a few

seconds to tick by, Misora added, “The L I knew when I was investigating with him was the kind of person who was stubborn and never gave up. It’s not like him to admit he’s wrong.”

“You want me to admit that I still see him as a suspect despite his official standing in the investigation and my temporary retirement.” L stated rather than asked.

“I’ve seen it happen many times in my line of work.” Misora said, indirectly answering him. “One or more investigators working a case get emotionally invested and they form a pet theory. They become so convinced of it and want it to be true so badly that they start to ignore evidence to the contrary. They start working with a noticeable confirmation bias and before they know it, they’re looking to prove themselves right rather than to find the truth.”

All of this she said with a careful calm, as if she were worried that L would react poorly. L couldn’t understand the concern. He wasn’t in the habit of reacting explosively or emotionally to things, even allegations of him being biased in his investigation. He was not Aizawa.

“You don’t think that I’m Kira. Yet, you believe I’m biased on the idea of Light being Kira, even to the point of adversely affecting the investigation?” L responded, trying to get a better idea of what was going on in the head of one of the only investigators that he respected.

“I think you’ve gotten too invested in the idea that Light is Kira.” Misora answered, readily. “Tell me, if you were looking at this case from the outside, knowing only the facts of it, what would you think about the person leading the investigation who is sure this spotless college student is a supernatural killer?”

“I would think he was crazy.” L answered quietly after some hesitation.

Misora sighed, tiredly. “Tell me, Ryuzaki. What do you hope to gain from this insistence that Light is Kira? What proof do you even have besides your conviction that he’s guilty?”

I have all of Light’s little almost-confessions, L thought to himself sulkily. He thought better of saying it, though. If he did, he would have to explain in detail how Light said things that were near confessions to him and then he would have to listen as Misora took those instances apart to explain how they could’ve been completely innocent comments that simply sounded guilty. L could see it now.

Light had been very careful to keep his statements to L just vague enough that he couldn’t use them as evidence of Light’s guilt. In fact, all of Light’s actions were just vague enough that they could only act as circumstantial evidence at best.

Reluctantly, L acknowledged, “I have only my experience as an investigator.” Which was no insubstantial thing, given that he was the best three investigators in the world and how long he had been in this career.

Misora sighed. “It’s not like I can’t understand how important relying on your instincts can be in solving a case. I’ve done it plenty of times before to the detriment of my reputation in the FBI, even when I turned out to be right,” She confessed, commiserating with him. “But if this were an investigation run by anyone else, you would’ve been charged with harassment by now. You put cameras in your suspects room - including their bedroom and bathroom, you’ve tried to get closer to them on a friendly basis, and you even followed them to their college classes. As if that wasn’t bad enough, what do you have to show for it?” She asked, seeming at the same time both gentle and firm.

L sighed. “I have very little to show for it.” The admission burned his tongue like acid.

Misora paused for several very long seconds, taking him in. “How much longer are you going to persist in this before you point your attention elsewhere? Light isn’t a killer. You’ve investigated and you’ve come up with nothing and it’s already harmed the investigation. Instead of finding the person who is actually Kira, you’re focusing your attention on a college student who’s already been cleared. Do you know what some of the investigators have been thinking about lately? They’ve been saying that if you are Kira, it would make sense of why you’re going so hard on Light. It would mean that you’re trying to blame an innocent young man, ignorant to the world, for your own crimes.”

L’s hands clenched tightly against his knees. “Is that so? I can understand the thought process behind it, even if it is ultimately incorrect.” He allowed himself to say.

“What I’m trying to say,” Misora said, sounding slightly exasperated. “Is that I don’t think it’s good for you or for the investigation to continue focusing on Light the way you have. Officially, he’s no longer a suspect, but I think most of us can see past that to see that on some level, you haven’t given up on your pet theory. You asked me how you’re going to define both of your roles going forward now that your official statuses have changed and here it is: you need to accept the official status and stop using suspicion of Light’s innocence to excuse anything you say or do regarding him.”

“Is that what you think I’ve been doing? Using suspicion of him being Kira as a veil to shroud other motives?” L felt himself irked at the term ‘pet theory’ being attributed to his suspicions even if he couldn’t extend the same irritation to her insinuating he was lying about his motivations. “You sound like you’re implying that I actively want Light to be Kira and that’s why I am so convinced of it.” Rather than it being based on his intuition.

“Well, do you?” Misora returned back.

This direct question caused L to pause. Did he want Light to be Kira?

As he stopped to consider it, he realized that he’d been attributing so much of his suspicion of Light to Light’s own actions and his intuition in the matter, that he’d never considered the realm of desire. If he truly did *want* Light to be Kira.

“Maybe…” L started haltingly, his mind whirling at this new insight into himself as he spoke. “There is a chance that you may be right… no…yes, I think you are right, after all. Now that I think about it, that does make sense. I think I *want* Light to be Kira.”

L saw Misora’s fist clench and then unclench, but couldn’t venture what she was feeling about what he said. “Has your sudden realization brought with it why you want Light to be Kira?” She pressed.

L considered answering honestly the idea that he did have about why. Coming to the conclusion that he may benefit from doing so, he answered honestly. “It may be primarily because I don’t want to be wrong.”

Before he could continue, an excited Misora pressed further. “And why do you not want to be wrong? Do you know?”

L wasn’t sure he did. He was far better at interrogating others than he was himself and he wasn’t being given nearly enough time to come to terms with his thoughts and follow them to their logical conclusions.

When L didn’t respond quick enough, falling into silence instead,

Misora asked, “Do you want to know what I think the reason is? Why don't you want to be wrong about Light?”

L really didn’t. However, he endeavored to be logical about this. “What is your conclusion?” He forced himself to ask.

Seemingly realizing how far she’d been leaning forward, Misora sat back in her chair to give him some more space while she shared her conclusion. “I feel that you don’t want to be wrong about Light because then you’d have to confront how you really feel about him.”

L clenched his hands onto his knee tightly, his knuckles turning white. “This stems from your belief that I’m using suspicion as a shroud to excuse my every behavior.” It wasn’t a question. “And what are my feelings about him?”

“I don’t know.” Misora answered honestly, perhaps surprisingly to L. “I truly don’t know how you really feel about him, I’m not a mind reader, but I know that whatever it is, you haven’t been honest about it. To us, to Light, or to yourself. As long as you can tell us and yourself that Light is Kira and everything you do or say is about investigating that line of reasoning, you don’t have to ask yourself why you’re doing something. If you watch Light too much when you’re in a room together, you can just say you’re suspicious of him. If you fail to move onto other suspects and continue to focus on Light, you can say it’s just your conviction to the case. All the time and attention and thought you put into the boy can be excused away so you never have to question if there’s another reason why you’re doing it.”

Misora’s tone started getting heated near the end and she took a breath before continuing. “Have you ever thought that maybe it’s not all about not wanting to be wrong because of your flawless record for cases and more because…if Light wasn’t Kira, then you’d have to leave him alone and you don’t want to do that? And if Light isn’t Kira, then you have to ask yourself why you’ve been so obsessed with him?

And you don't want to do that, either."

L had long since fallen silent as he listened to her thoughts, partly in what he identified as horror. He couldn't immediately refute the allegations. That didn't mean they were true either, but L was incredibly uncomfortable with the questions she'd raised. Somehow, he found this harder to think about than when he'd been accused of being Kira and that had been a grave insult to him and his reputation. He almost felt as if the wheels in his brain had stopped turning completely, mentally freezing up.

He was vaguely aware of hearing Misora sigh. "I'm not going to demand answers from you or tell you what to do. That, at least, I definitely don't have a right to do. But Light is a good kid, me and my fiance are both so much better off for having met him and nothing between you two is ever going to get resolved if you aren't willing to ask yourself the hard questions. Light taught me that, among other things. Perhaps it's time you asked yourself the hard questions. That's my advice." Misora calmly stated.

Without saying anything else or waiting for a response from the unresponsive but listening L, she got up from her seat and walked to the door. L absently listened to the door opening and closing as she left. Left alone, L sat in silence for seconds and then minutes, his mind unusually still. More still than he could ever remember it being, so used to thoughts and observations constantly rushing through like a busy train station.

L knew that he'd acknowledged some feelings for Light before, but suddenly he was confronted with an even worse proposition. That those feelings might have been so significant that he could be torpedoing the entire case in an effort to avoid them. Worse. If Light truly wasn't Kira or L actually failed to convict him, he'd have no more excuses for why he focused so much on Light.

If that excuse was stripped away…what would be left?

The hollow question tormented him in the empty room.

~ ❶ ~

I, Near thought to himself as he sat next to Light, who was praising his investigative skills and showering him with information about his end of the case. *May have encountered a serious problem.*

Chapter End Notes

> And what we see alongside Light and L's relationship and Light being suspicious is more of that childhood trauma. I personally believe - watching L in the series - that L has a deep problem with making genuine emotional connections with others (though not the inability). Not in the "he takes time to warm up to people" kind of way but in the "he can live with people for years and not feel anything, raise children as weapons, and doesn't mind his coworkers dying" kind of way. Hence, my "may be a sociopath" tag. I'm convinced of this!! And I would bet money that the fact that he was seemingly abandoned by his parents, had a high IQ, had no close friends growing up, and received little to no parental affection from his only parental figure all worked to create that problem.
> Hm...I wonder what Misa and Mello are up to?
> Also, Near POV in the next chapter! It'll be first thing~

Knowing Someone

Chapter Summary

Near, Misa, and Mello! The triple whammy!

Watari looks up

Chapter Notes

I have had a hell of a month so far. But I'm here! Mentally and emotionally exhausted, but I'm here! ^v^
I promise I'm okay. Don't fear (my health is stable) and just let me know what you like and don't like about this chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Near hadn't *really* thought that Light would simply step out of the case gracefully, if he was indeed Kira. So he was expecting Light to want to badger him about knowing what was going on in the investigation, but when he showed up, Light wasn't the least bit agitated and when he arrived, he greeted Near warmly and didn't pressure for further conversation.

Something Near recognized immediately was that Light's face showed no signs of stress, even subtle ones. One would think that prolonged exposure to an investigation where he had been - and continues to be - the main suspect would prey on someone mentally, but Light was different.

Each of the few times Near had seen him, Light truly appeared nothing but at ease here, like he hadn't a care in the world. No fear of being captured in the slightest. The only time Near had seen him get angry was on his behalf and that was another thing.

The moment Light had spotted him, the man had once again begun acting like how Near imagined an older sibling would act.

Near had shied away from having any expectations or formulating any theories before he got here and it was a good thing he had. Light's behavior flew in the face of everything a person might expect. He didn't look down on Near or his abilities because he was young, but he also got upset with L for bringing someone Near's age into this. Near hadn't really thought he was going to see someone tear L a new one on his first day on the job.

Near blinked as Light dropped a blanket on him. "You looked cold." Light said at his questioning look.

"You said that last time." Near said, to which Light shrugged carelessly.

"You always look cold." The brunette said.

Near glanced down at himself but as far as he could tell, he wasn't shivering or anything else that would be indicative of chill. Near twitched as he felt a hand touch his head and tousle his hair.

"Don't think about it too hard, Kid." Light said before pacing over to a chair and sitting down. "Those are new." He said, gesturing to the toys Near was using.

"They help me think." Near explained, maybe defended. He didn't want to be seen as childish.

"I can see why." Light responded, simply. His tone was so politely neutral that Near had to come to his own conclusions about what the man was thinking.

“I’ll ask you to not patronize me.” Near mumbled, a little miffed.

“I’m not.” Light said, sitting up a little. “You use toys to represent your thoughts. Dolls represent people as you see them while other toys represent concepts or structures. Having them and moving them around helps give physical form to your thoughts and gets them out of your head. It makes your thoughts less cluttered and more organized, leading to better deductions. I can see exactly why you use them, I’m not patronizing you.”

Near wanted to gape at the man when he was done, but he just stared at him instead. He didn’t think anyone besides Roger and L would understand his methods. Even in Wammy’s House, he was seen as something of an oddity, even while being one of the highest achievers there. He had never felt this…anyway. Near decided to ask some questions about Light’s experiences being investigated in the case. See if there was anything L didn’t want him to know.

“I read the official information on the case regarding you, but I’d like some clarity on a few more things.” Near stated.

“Of course. Anything you’d like.” Light agreed, easily.

“So the first time you met L face-to-face was during the entrance exams for your To-Oh, correct?” He asked.

“Yes, although I didn’t know it was him for quite some time afterwards.” Light nodded.

“I read that you befriended L soon after.” Near also said.

“We talked in the hallway right after the exam, actually. He finished right after me.” Light gave additional information.

“And what did you have to talk about?” Near asked.

“We didn’t really have anything to talk about. Except maybe how quickly the both of us finished.” Light gave a little laugh. “I guess I just wanted to get to know him since I found him charming.”

What? He found L charming? Near couldn’t say he’d heard that one from L’s cases before. “Why?” Near asked, nonplussed.

“Huh. I suppose the first thing I found charming about him was how intelligent he must have been. It was nice that we finished the test so close together.” Light explained, gaze drifting as he spoke. ”After that, I really liked the manner in which he behaved. I know it’s natural for him to hunch in his seat and to dress so casually even though he was at the entrance test for such a prestigious university and things like that. He’s just doing what he finds comfortable, but the fact that he dared to, regardless of what it made people think about him, was so different from what I was used to that I couldn’t help but be charmed by it.”

“What do you mean?” Near asked, curiously.

Light’s smile took on a slightly sad note. “I spent a lot of my life worrying about being flawless. About making sure that I looked perfect to everyone. People have different ideas of perfection, so to look that way to the world, I had to change myself slightly depending on who I was talking to.”

“I don’t really know what that’s like…” Near had always been himself, even if people didn’t like him for it. He never saw the sense in

pandering.

“That’s good.” Light said. “You shouldn’t define yourself by what others think about you.”

…can I ask how you changed depending on the person?” Near wanted to know more about this.

Light thought about it for a moment. “For my dad, being passionate about justice and honor were the things. He liked me talking about having a strong sense of belief in those.”

“Did you really believe in those things?” Near asked.

“I’m not sure.” Light murmured. “I might not have in the way that he would’ve wanted me to.” Near didn’t know what that was supposed to mean but before he could ask about it, Light moved on. “But for a lot of my peers at school, some might admire that same passion but others might feel constrained by it.

A lot of them felt pressured and judged by their parents so they wanted to go to school and complain about it without getting that same judgment. For them, Light Yagami was a cool and understanding guy who always listened and didn’t talk about his own strong opinions, if he had any. For professors, I was quiet, polite and respectable, and never caused any trouble.”

“How did you manage to do all that?” Because Near couldn’t imagine doing it himself.

“By having a good control of myself.” Light spoke quietly. “A few close friends.”

“You couldn’t have any friends?” Near furrowed his brows.

“If you have someone really close to you, they’ll eventually see who you really are. And who you really are will never be perfect.” Light supplied, just as quietly. His eyes looked like he was looking somewhere past the room they were in.

That was something Near could empathize with. He knew what it was like to be always alone even when living with other people. Near had always felt alone. He’d grown up in an orphanage and even when he was taken to Wammy’s House, everyone always kept to themselves. Mello was the only person there who really talked to Near, so he didn’t mind that the older boy mostly did so by yelling at him.

But that did make him wonder about something.

“But when we met before, I saw you socializing with several members of the investigative team.” Near pointed out what he saw as an inconsistency. “You seemed quite close then. Or am I misunderstanding something?”

“You’re misunderstanding nothing.” Light smiled, looking less sad now. “I like to think that we *are* close.”

“But you were successful in looking perfect before..?” Near questioned in confusion.

“I was, for a time.” Light agreed. “It took me forever to realize, but there’s something much better that I could achieve something much better than success by getting close to people.”

“Like what?” Near asked. He hadn’t heard this before.

“Happiness.” Light said, surprisingly. He gave Near a soft, somewhat sad smile. “I got happiness and I want that for you, too.”

Near was bewildered by both the response and Light’s continued regard for him. “You don’t even know me.” How could he possibly care about Near’s happiness? Near didn’t even care about his own “happiness”.

“I don’t need to. I want you to be happy anyway.” Light said, easily. “You’re a sweet kid. You deserve everything.”

What even was Light Yagami?

~ ❶ ~

Naomi was beginning to find interacting with Misa nerve wracking.

She tried her best not to see Misa as the innocent girl that she appeared as when she’d first approached her. Her job with the FBI had done a decent job at teaching her that appearances mean nothing, even if one could never fully train themselves out of judging people by appearances. Still, even if she was careful when engaging with the young girl - especially since she was bafflingly in the position of having Misa think she was both Kira *and* L - she was beginning to get unnerved the longer this charade went on.

Misa had a particular trait, it appeared. One that wasn’t at all

apparent upon first meeting her. Naomi would say that it probably wouldn't have even been apparent after knowing her for a little while if the situation had been different. That trait being obsession.

Maybe, Naomi acknowledged to herself. *I mostly find it discomforting because the person she's obsessing over is* ***Kira*** *but…* But it was off-putting listening to the girl talk. Not only about Kira's killings, but about Kira themself and sometimes L, although she usually referred to her as Kira. She talked like she knew Kira personally but by her own admission, she didn't. Yet she spoke like they were best friends or close colleagues and the way she talked about Kira's acts, as if she knew all of Kira's motives for absolute certain. It created this sense of forced intimacy. She was acting as if she had intimate knowledge of someone she didn't even know at all. Even if Naomi *had* been Kira, they'd only had a handful of conversations where Misa did most of the talking.

It was…unsettling. If Naomi truly had been Kira rather than a third party wedged in the middle of the two, she was sure she would've been even more freaked out. Although Naomi felt it might be going a bit far at that point, she almost wanted to call the behavior stalkerish even if the girl's behavior so far hadn't been that serious.

It also didn't bode well for if she realized L wasn't in fact Kira. Despite no one having died during Misa's little TV stunt, she was no longer sure that the girl wouldn't be dangerous - if push came to shove. She was showing signs similar to that of a religious fanatic and any officer worth their pay knew what happened when you gave one of those types a gun.

"Can you tell me what your next move will be? Maybe I can help!" Misa requested excitedly, not for the first time, punctuating Naomi's thoughts.

Worried about committing to anything, especially since she couldn't control or possibly know what Kira was going to do, and running out

of ways to distract the girl without repeating herself, Naomi said vaguely, “I don’t need any help with my plans, though I’ll be sure to ask if I do.” She was banking on Misa’s respect for Kira to let it pass, that she wouldn’t presume to try to insist that Kira needed her help.

“Oh, of course!” Misa bubbled in her usual way, a normally ingratiating manner that was becoming more eerie as her contrasting obsessive traits became more visible. “I’m sure there’s not much I can do, but I’ll do anything I can! I’m a model, you know! I know some people and if there’s a message you’d like me to get out about your ideals…”

Naomi shoved down the curdling feeling she felt in her gut at Misa and others like her sharing Kira’s “message” to the world. Like his mouthpiece except with the popularity and potential to get into the years of thousands of impressionable teens and preteens. It was a chilling prospect what effect that kind of thing could have on those kids if their idols started spouting such a rhetoric.

“That’s fine. Please don’t do anything for now. If you move on your own, you could say something that would make it harder for me with the police.” She said, forcing a bland smile.

“Oh, right! I would never want to make things harder for you! Just being able to meet with you is enough for me. I’ll wait until you tell me what to do, I promise.” Misa said with wide eyes.

Naomi breathed a sigh of relief. That worked for now. The situation was unstable, but as long as she remained above water, they didn’t have to worry about Misa doing something like she did last time. Even worse if she actually managed to contact the real Kira who might take her up on her offer.

…

Unbeknownst to her, Misa was becoming suspicious.

~ ❶ ~

Mello was currently digging for info. He didn't know what he was looking for, exactly. Just something he could use to prove Kira's identity. It's not like he had a theory about who that might be, though, so he was just shifting through the available information on the case. There was a lot there, but nothing of substance.

He and Matt were holed up in a completely different hotel from the investigators. They had to be, according to L. Kira, he had informed them, was all but proven to have some kind of supernatural ability. The capabilities - and more so, the limitations - of that ability weren't well known. Mello got that, but it still annoyed him. The fact that Near was at the center of it all and even got to spend time with L while Mello wasn't even allowed to go to the hotel for fear of someone seeing him…it made him feel even more cast to the side.

Mello grit his teeth and looked even harder for info. There was a crazy amount of information on this *one guy* and almost nothing on anyone else, what was up with that? It almost looked like L was obsessed with this Light Yagami guy, but that couldn't be right.

Mello found himself going back to the beginning of the investigation once the more recent information didn't pan out. If the latest developments in the case didn't have much, then it made logical sense to go back to the beginning. There had been more suspects in the beginning, too, even if most of the leads naturally wouldn't amount to much. Then again, Kira didn't need to be one person.

Mello quickly noticed a trend in Kira's killings, probably the same

ones that L had noticed. Kira's killings first became noticeable in Japan before spreading to the rest of the world and he only killed people who committed serious crimes. After watching a recording of the confrontation between L and Kira on TV, Mello decided to research any deaths that happened in or around the area that L had narrowed it down to. Even though L had recalled what he thought to be Kira's first kill, the more Mello thought about it, that might not have been their first one. Even if it was, there might have been others.

In the time since then, they've learned that Kira can likely kill through accidents, which made it harder. What Mello didn't know was if anyone had gone back to review with that in mind. Mello spent an annoying few days combing through reports of *all* deaths in Japan in the entire region for the span of time before, during, and after that kindergarten hostage situation L spoke about. Mello had to force himself to slow down at several points, because he'd just rather be done with the whole thing but he didn't want to miss something because he sped through.

And then he found it.

Initially, nothing about the death was strange. No, what was strange were the deaths that trailed after it. That, and what he had apparently been doing at the time of his death.

There was a news report dated very close to the hostage situation. A man who was part of a gang that had apparently been causing trouble in the area was hit by a semi truck. It was so innocuous that Mello wouldn't have even noticed it if he wasn't combing through all the death records. He still wouldn't have cared, except that he looked briefly into the background of each person who died and suddenly noticed a link between more than one individual who died close to each other.

The aforementioned gang member was the first to die, but quickly

following him were five more deaths, each person eventually being identified as a member of the same gang. They all died in various ways, none of which were heart attacks. According to police records, none of these deaths were ever noted as strange and no links were ever made between all the deaths.

It wasn't normal for a bunch of people who belonged to the same group to die in rapid succession.

Not unless it was murder, anyway.

So Mello looked over the first death again, giving it far more attention this time than his initial cursory viewing. Although the guy was in a gang, nothing jumped out at Mello that made him think that the man would make it onto Kira's hit list. Well, not until he got to the part of the report that included a particular witness statement. It had taken the police nearly a week to track down one of the witnesses because she had fled the scene.

They did get a statement from someone in one of the shops nearby who didn't see the accident but came out when they heard it. The shop employee apparently saw a young woman running off down the street away from the accident, but could only identify her to a certain extent. They got a statement from the guy's gang friends who for some reason stuck around at the scene and were brought in. They were able to give a better description of the woman and were able to explain what role she played in the accident. They admitted that they were "harassing" the woman and that their friend was hit while chasing her after she got away.

They managed to track her down using that information and while the woman was scared about being brought in for questioning, she did end up giving her statement and providing more detail about the encounter. Not surprisingly, the surviving gang members had downplayed the severity of the encounter. The woman made it clear that the man who died was going to rape her. That put things into a

different league, as far as Mello was concerned.

Based on their killings, Kira treated rapists the same way they treated murderers; there was no distinction between the two. If Kira had witnessed the rape attempt - which they would have had to in order to kill the man while he was committing the act - then there was no question that Kira *would* have killed him. Whether or not Kira really was to blame for the "accident" was up in the air. Should they have been there, though, the attack that they must have witnessed would have placed the man squarely on Kira's hit list.

Mello noted that if he was right, then Kira's next several kills quickly followed his first one on that news recording and they had already realized that they could kill in ways other than a heart attack by that point. So that wasn't something they learned much later. Mello would need to think about how they knew about their powers later. And if Kira had any reservations about killing, they were gone quickly.

So these were Kira kills, but what did that mean? Well, it meant that Kira was there at that location and that meant there could be evidence somewhere. Kira's main advantage was that they could kill without being physically present, because physically existing in a place not only placed limitations on people but simply existing in an area also left evidence. Maybe Kira had learned the parameters of their ability by then, but they didn't know not to kill people they'd interacted with before.

Mello quickly messaged Watari, letting him know that he needed the security camera footage from every store on that street. Well, whatever was left, anyway. This happened months ago.

The reply from Watari saying that he would get on it was instant. Mello let out a sigh and leaned back in his chair, but he couldn't relax with how fast his heart was beating. This could be his big break! If there was any archived footage of that night, it might have caught an image of Kira!

Mello's leg shook with nervous energy, waiting impatiently for Watari to acquire the footage.

~ ❶ ~

*So **that's** what's going on,* Ryuk thought as he hovered over the old guy's shoulder. It was easy to read a person's text messages over their shoulder when they didn't know you were there.

The contact on the old man's phone was just "M", but it was enough. Ryuk remembered that person from the last timeline. So this was the source of Light's off feeling. Both N and M were out in the field…

Ryuk was starting to wonder if the two were a package deal, with how often they showed up together. At any rate, he would need to tell Light about this and also ask him if he knew what that footage thing was about. Ryuk started to get bored listening to the old guy as he made a bunch of calls to stores about this camera or that camera and if they had backups.

Maybe I should move on and come back later. There's only so much I can get from one side of a conversation, anyway. Ryuk thought, spreading his wings. *Light can't move freely right now, I'll get some more info before getting back to him.*

There was one other place he needed to go. Light wanted to know why he'd been thrown back in time in the human world and Ryuk could admit that he was curious about why Light wasn't dead, too. Ryuk had told the truth during their reunion all those months ago when he said that he hadn't heard anything about other Shinigami coming back after their deaths and it had been a while since the human world had gotten rewound like this.

For a long while, Light didn't seem to really care about why it happened, being more concerned with taking advantage of the opportunity it provided. Ryuk wasn't actually sure why Light cared now, but he was happy to oblige!

It didn't take Ryuk long to make the familiar journey to the Shinigami Realm. He had already questioned nearly all of the other Shinigami to see if they knew anything, but unsurprisingly, they didn't know more than what he did. It's not like his kind had much else to do with their days other than gamble and gossip. If they'd known something like that, then they probably would've relished telling everyone about it.

That meant that his last chance at getting any info on what happened was to go to the higher ups. Not exactly something he wanted to do, but it was unavoidable now that his own little investigation hadn't panned out so far. There were only two beings that might have the answer if no one else did.

The realm looked the same as the last time he was there, ever unchanging. Stationary, unlike the human world that Ryuk found so fascinating. While human nature remained the same, their world reinvented itself every time he looked away. So he tried not to look away. He wanted to see it happen.

Once arriving, Ryuk trudged his way through the decaying world with his destination in mind. Every once in a while he was stopped by one of his fellows who wanted to know when he got back and if they'd missed something interesting that had happened.

With the combined intrigue of following Light through both of his human lives, Ryuk had become a minor celebrity in his home realm. At the very least, the other Shinigami were eager to know what he and Light were cooking up at any given time. He didn't run into that many of the others and he wasn't surprised, given their penchant for

grouping and settling down in corners. Gambling or, more likely these days, peering down into the human world.

His goal was on the far end of the realm. Very few ever saw their king, even fewer knew what the old man even did most of the time. Ryuk had never truly cared what the King was up to, but he remembered something Chronos said to him before when it had come up. " *It must be very boring…ruling over a dying world."* Having it said like that, Ryuk had to agree.

More often, the Shinigami interacted with the King's right-hand man, Armonia. Even still, they only bothered with him when someone wanted something. He was who Ryuk was seeking out now. He might be one of the few individuals that could know how Light had come back to life. Armonia was very knowledgeable even if he was arrogant. Light had become one of them, so if Armonia didn't know what happened, then he should soon.

The man was where he usually was, on the far end of their world, sat upon his throne. The Shinigami looked like a golden gem-encrusted skeleton, some of his limbs replaced with metal parts.

"Ryuk." The other Shinigami said, his voice at a higher pitch than most of their kind even as his throat had that same raspy note that most of them had.

Ryuk tucked in his wings and landed just in front of the throne. Normally, he didn't like this guy. He was arrogant on top of other things, but he could bite back on that so that he could figure out what Light needed to know.

"Yeah, it's me." Ryuk said, slouching forward once his feet touched the ground. "I wanted some advice."

“Not abnormal. Many come to me for advice.” Armonia stated calmly. “However, I do think I have advice for you before you speak.”

“You do?” Ryuk blinked. *I wonder if he actually knows something or if he’s just talking out of his-*

“I’ve heard you’ve been asking questions a lot lately. Rumors. None have been able to help you.” Armonia twirled a gem in his hand lazily as he spoke. “In addition, the King has given me a standing order for if you were to show up before me. He said I was to send you to speak to him in person.” He gestured to the expanse of world behind him, past which was the cave where the old man resided.

Ryuk’s wings fluttered in surprise and confusion. “He wants me to speak with him directly?” The last time anyone was able to do that was when he was bribed with apples for an additional notebook and it hadn’t even been him who did it…

Armonia hummed, thoughtfully. “Indeed. Something about Chronos, though I’ll let him tell you himself.” Armonia said vaguely, using Light’s Shinigami name.

“I’ll go right now!” Ryuk said, spreading his wings and immediately lifting off. Armonia didn’t try to stop him, just watched him go with an amused smirk, and soon Ryuk was standing in front of the King’s cave feeling excitement well up inside him as he stepped inside. It wasn’t like he had any real respect for the old man, but he might be about to find the answers he wanted.

Right inside was the Shinigami King, a tentacled skeleton creature hanging from the ceiling that defied further description. “Ah, it’s you.” The Shinigami King croaked, his voice taking up the entire cavern.

“Yeah, it’s me. Word is you have something that you wanted to say to me.” Ryuk said.

“Must be about Chronos, then.” The chains holding up the King’s form creaked. “You know, when you first dropped a notebook into the human world and took up there for several years, I didn’t understand you one bit. It all seemed terribly boring and meaningless to me. That is, until Chronos.”

Ryuk had been looking to interrupt the old man’s boring speech, but that last part made him stop short. “Chronos? Do you know how he was created?” Because neither Ryuk nor the other Shinigami knew how their kind were created or “born” and Chronos had been the first new one in a *very* long time, at any rate.

“ *I* created him. Shinigami are rare because a human must catch my interest before I would spend my time on making them a god of death. Sadly, most lose their purpose in the centuries following.” The King said straightforwardly. That wasn’t an answer but it was.

Ryuk hated vague things. More pressing though… “Why did you create him? I thought you thought what I was doing was boring.”

The King groaned. “Perhaps misleading. I should say, I didn’t understand until Kira. Chronos does like that moniker when he’s in the human world, doesn't he? Kira was quite the interesting human. Not just their body count - quite impressive for such a short time period - but also the absolute chaos that he rained down on his world was a thing of beauty. His ending wasn’t the best, I admit, but I still fell in love with him through the stunts he pulled.”

“In love?!” Ryuk nearly choked on his own spit when he heard that.

The thought of the old man being in love with his bestie made him some kind of sick.

"Oh, not like that." The King said, sounding absolutely done with him. "Like a parent with their favorite child. I decided that he would be one of my children once he died, so I caught his soul as he departed his world and transformed him into one of my Shinigami. Who do you think gave him his name? Who do you think ordered Armonia to inform you of who Chronos used to be as a human and task you with overseeing his transition?"

Ryuk hadn't thought about it at all. If anything, he just thought Armonia had told him that because he was lazy and just wanted to pass their newest member onto the only Shinigami who happened to have already known him when he was alive.

Wait.

"Hold on! Don't tell me that the reason Chronos was reborn into his past life as a human after he died was–"

"Pure, unadulterated favoritism." The Shinigami King stated. "From before he died as a human, he was a favorite of mine and he became even more so as one of my Shinigami. Normally, I don't interfere with the flow of things even though I could do so. I have never before brought one of my Shinigami back from the brink of death until now. If a Shinigami does something that results in their death, I ordinarily let them make their own choices. But Chronos was different. I couldn't stand his existence being wiped from the world after seeing all that he was capable of."

"Because he entertained you?" Ryuk could understand that. It wasn't until Light became Chronos that Ryuk's feelings towards Light moved from sheer entertainment to genuine friendship and care. Light was

nothing if not entertaining with his organized chaos.

“Hmm…yes, but that isn’t all. Entertainment is important in this dry existence, but it isn’t the extent of the importance he has gained in my regard.” The King stated.

“What else is there?” Ryuk asked.

“I have…for a time been considering a successor.” The King said.

“What?!” Ryuk squawked.

“What’s so surprising about it?” The King asked, as if he hadn’t been ruling their realm since as far back as Ryuk could remember. “Our species is not a transitory one and yet I find myself increasingly desirous of change as time goes on. Our world has been decaying for a long time. As hard as it may be for me to admit, this world may need a breath of fresh air and Chronos is the only one that could stand a chance at reviving a world as far gone as ours.”

“You’re looking to make Chronos your successor. The next Shinigami King.” Ryuk breathed out in realization.

“I believe he has the potential to be a better King than I am.” The King said by way of an answer. “Until then, I will let him have his fun in the human realm and I will enjoy watching him. He truly continues to earn the title of my favorite child.” For a few moments, a heavy silence hung between them, punctuated only by the clanking of chains. “Was there anything else you wanted to know?”

Ryuk tried to think, but it was hard with everything he’d learned

floating around in his head. He had found out what Light wanted to know, right? Was he forgetting something?

The King said after a few more seconds of awkward silence. “If that’s everything then, go back to Chronos and tell him what I said. Knowing him, he’ll wish to take advantage of being favored by the King of the Shinigami and I look forward to seeing how he does so.”

Ryuk knew when he was being dismissed. He didn’t even bother glancing at Armonia as he flew past him, only thinking about getting back to Light with the info he’d gathered.

~ ❹ ~

After talking with Misora and meeting back up with Light in their hotel room after Light’s meeting with Near, L told Light that he wanted to try a trial run of working together to solve unrelated crimes. Light was ecstatic and quickly shuffled them onto one of the beds, where they sat side by side with their laptops easily in view of each other. Meanwhile, L further considered what Misora had said to him.

L begrudgingly accepted that maybe some of what Ms. Misora had said was true. For once, L spent the afternoon paying more attention to his own reactions than Light’s. It wasn’t as if L was ignorant of all of how he reacted to Light’s presence, but giving it his undivided attention brought some things he’d overlooked to light.

L felt *warm* when Light smiled at him. He felt a mingling of irritation and excitement when they argued. Light challenged him and goaded him, then turned around and complimented and joked with him. It was such a confusing way to interact with someone, denoted by multiple feelings. L constantly shifted from frustration, to intrigue, to excitement, warmth, and humor. Not necessarily in that order.

Light confused and aggravated him, but being around him wasn't unpleasant. No, that wasn't it. It's more like it was actively pleasant being around him. It was the first time L spent with someone in the same league as him intellectually and even then, Light was different. The way he joked and poked fun at things…life, L, himself…livened up the atmosphere in the hotel room and L realized suddenly that he had always done that. He brightened things up the way his name made it seem like he would.

A moment later, L noticed that Light had been staring at this one man's profile on his screen for an unusual amount of time now. L pulled up the man's profile on his own screen and found his arrest record. He'd already been arrested, so L found himself confused about what Light wanted with him. Unless the boy thought he was actually innocent, you couldn't solve a crime that was already solved. Then he supposed the best way to find out was to ask.

"Is there something special about this man?" L spoke, the room otherwise silent. "Do you think he's a candidate for our first case together?"

Surprisingly, despite his clear interest in the person, Light's response was negative. "No, I don't think so. We promised we'd stay out of the Kira case and I think we might step on Kira's - or Near's - toes a little bit too much with this one."

"What do you mean by that?" L questioned, returning his gaze to the man's profile on the screen. "He doesn't appear to have any connection to Kira so far."

"But he might soon. I think this person could be one of Kira's potential victims in the future." Light said.

The statement surprised him and caused L to peer closer at the man in hopes of seeing whatever information had Light so bothered. The profile was that of an American inmate who had apparently gotten into a bad fight with another man in a bar, the other man later having died after sustaining several bad wounds and some internal bleeding.

“Why do you think that? He’s a low-level criminal.” L inquired, glancing over the profile.

“Look again.” Light said. “He’s in prison for an aggravated assault charge, but only because he made a plea deal. The crime he was originally charged with was manslaughter, but the American prosecutors probably didn’t think that they had enough evidence to get a conviction on a manslaughter charge, so they settled for the lesser charge of aggravated assault. Which means he could be on Kira’s hit list.”

L did look. And he considered. “You think that Kira will find out about the previous charge.”

“Right. And I think when he does, he’ll take exception to it.”

“To the fact that it was dropped in favor of a lesser sentence, you mean.” L said.

“Well, you have to admit, it’s not a good look.” Light offered.

“By your own admission, they may not have had enough evidence for a harsher sentence.” L reminded him.

“A more realistic sentence.” Light corrected.

L ignored that. “Are you saying this as Light Yagami or as a Kira supporter?”

“Is there a difference?” Light asked, rhetorically. “I support Kira for a reason. Our ideas align closely.”

“Your ideals that the courts should be harsher?” L inquired.

“Our ideals that people who commit terrible crimes shouldn’t be let off without a good reason…and lack of evidence to convince a jury isn’t a good reason. If there’s enough reason to tie one person to the severe harm or death of another, they shouldn’t be let off.”

“Would you rather people be charged with serious crimes without appropriate evidence?” L questioned him.

“Perfect knowledge is very rarely available.” Light returned. “But I can’t accept that lack of evidence, rather than a person’s innocence, is the deciding factor on whether justice is served.”

“Life forces people to make tough choices.” L pointed out, feeling Light idealistic.

“ *That* I can agree with.” Light said. “The question here is which is more important: lessening the risk that an innocent person is convicted or lessening the chance that a guilty person goes free. Both are important, but a better certainty of one naturally comes at the expense of the other. Additionally in question, as in the case with this individual, the law asked themselves if a greater probability of getting a conviction of *something* was worth getting a lesser sentence than the one for the crime the man actually committed.” He summed up.

L conceded the point. Light continued. “It’s a debate that there’s no objective right answer for. A decision *must* be made, but it’s something each person has to think about and come to a conclusion for themselves. Ask five people and you’ll get seven opinions, that sort of thing.” Light said with a vague smile.

“And you side with the stricter view that it’s better to lessen the chance of a guilty person going free.” L stated, rather than asked. What Light had said before and his siding with Kira in general both gave the impression that that was the case.

“I do.” Light agreed, easily.

“Even if that means Kira ends up killing an innocent person?”

“Even if.” Light nodded.

“Some may call that evil.” L said, needling him.

“Some may.” Light once again acknowledged. “I’m not terribly interested in making myself look good. What’s that saying? Everyone is the hero of their own story and the villain of someone else’s? There’s no avoiding that, I think. You can try to be a perfect saint all your life and you’ll still end up hurting somebody eventually, intentionally or otherwise.”

“Murder of an innocent is quite a bigger deal than that.” L argued.

“It is.” L acknowledged. “I was being blasé in my wording, but in

reality, the consequences of one's actions rise in severity the higher the stakes of the situation. If the stakes are that a violent person could be let out early, the responsibility and risk are naturally raised to meet that. It's the weight of a human life."

"And how do you find yourself weighing that cost?" L tilted his head as he asked, taking the chance to hear more about how Kira's mind worked.

"Evidence is a factor, but the greatest weight always goes to the worst possible outcome. A factor of *that* is how serious the crime was."

"And what is the worst possible outcome in this man's case?" L asked, even though he always knew.

Light tapped the screen where the man's photo was and simply said, "That this man kills again."

"So for fear of the worst case scenario, you're willing to have an innocent person sentenced." L meant for that to sound as accusatory as it did, so he was surprised by Light's continued nonchalant agreement.

"Ideally not, but that's about it." Light nodded, before turning towards the window to stare outside. "The world is messy. It can be beautiful but it can also be ugly. Humanity is just the same. So maybe Kira's solution can be allowed to be messy, as well. Maybe it has to be."

"That sounds like an excuse to justify it. In that world, people would live in fear." L argued, finding Light was overlooking the important issue. "They would live in fear of committing any crime for fear of death, since Kira can only kill his targets. Worse, even if they don't commit a crime, they could be killed for being falsely accused."

“Personally, I don’t see the difference between that and the reality we live in now.” Light calmly responded. “Every year, they find more and more people in the prison system who are being revealed as innocent. Some having spent close to a decade in prison. They never get those years back and even once they get out, no one wants to hire them for jobs and people in their communities will always give them the side-eye. Despite being let out, they struggle for the rest of their lives.

Meanwhile, with violent crime rates being what they are, people live in fear every day. Locking their doors at night, setting up security cameras and alarms and whole systems, the streets being empty at night due to the danger…heck! Small children are told repeatedly to be wary of strangers and schools in America routinely experience deadly shootings! We all treat these things like they’re normal… they’re not normal. Why is it that toddlers are taught never to talk to strangers, L?”

“It’s a precaution for their safety.” L said.

“It’s because people are *afraid,* L.” Light said. “How can we ignore that and excuse it away by saying ‘well, the system isn’t perfect’. No system is without flaws - Kira’s isn’t - but that should never be the excuse to ignore valid concerns.”

“And you think people will be less scared - not more - under the dictatorship of Kira?” L pushed him.

“Maybe, maybe not. The question is: will people still be in constant fear that someone will hurt them or their loved ones’? As it stands, people are in a constant defensive state, preparing for attack. Rape, murder, home invasion, theft, kidnapping, shootouts, human trafficking. We spend our whole lives trying to avoid falling victim to these things and many fail.”

“And the innocent people who die in the process? They’re expendable?” L asked.

“People’s lives aren’t worthless, they aren’t tools.” Light reminded him, strongly. “But if a person’s death can achieve something bigger than themselves, like enforcing the safety of the world, the lines blur then. At least for me. I don’t like it, but what if Kira killing someone for a crime they looked guilty of but were actually innocent prevented three more murders from occurring?

Maybe a would-be serial killer hears of the execution and doesn’t want to risk it. Or several one-time killers see it and decide pulling something isn’t worth the risk. Either way, that one innocent death could prevent many more innocent deaths. In that situation, an innocent will die either way but the greater good is done by saving the most people. Human life has a price. You don’t have to like it, but *everything* has a cost. The cost of safety is freedom and vice versa. The price of being too wary of making a mistake in a conviction is no conviction and the costs of that are the risk of future harm and the absence of justice.”

Light took a shallow breath. “So the cost of a human life or its price can be leveraged. *How* a person dies is just as important as why. Dying by car accident two years from now doesn’t help society, but being executed to act as a deterrent against violent crime does.”

“I think most people on the team would disagree with you.” Because if they disagreed with L’s methods, they would surely object to this.

“And they have every right to.” Light said. “But the results are undeniable in its effectiveness. It’s unpleasant and people should decide for themselves if they believe the method is justified. But by the numbers, world crime has dropped significantly since Kira’s existence was proven to the world and I know that you know that.

What I suggested is happening. Every person Kira kills deters more violent crime and not by a small amount. It's messy but it *works* .

And it's a bold assumption to make that the person Kira executes is even innocent. Kira kills a lot of people who have already been through the justice system and found guilty and they probably investigate the others. Kira's rate of killing isn't particularly fast so it would allow for that. The potential innocents killed are a drop in the bucket compared to the *definite* innocents that are saved by Kira's actions."

"I notice that you talk more about the prevention of more crimes than getting justice for past ones." L pointed out.

"For me, it's the most important part. Although getting justice for living victims is also important. Preventing further victims is a tangible good that can be done." Light siad.

"By striking fear into the hearts of criminals and civilians alike." L stated, because regardless of what Light said about people already being afraid, his method would still have people fearful.

"Fear works." Light returned. "You mock it, but it works. Sometimes fear is the only thing that stops someone from doing something stupid, especially if the person in question is selfish and thinks mostly about themself. Criminals don't fear the justice system enough. Even if they end up being wrong, they believe they won't get caught and so they knowingly commit crimes and nothing that happens afterwards can make it so that crime didn't happen. In other words, it relies on the fear of retribution. Not enough people fear the system as it is."

"That sounds similar to the mafia." L couldn't say why. Maybe it was the ruling through fear idea.

“Kira can scare them, too.” Light said. “But there is something I’d like to ask now, if you’ve had your fill.”

“What do you want to know?” L asked, somewhat uneasily.

“What exactly is your problem with Kira?” Light asked.

L was nonplussed. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I know the others are investigating because they probably believe killing is wrong, no matter the reason. They see Kira as a serial killer needing to be brought to justice. As officers, they kind of have to see it that way. It’s you that I’ve started to wonder about.”

“I also think Kira needs to be brought to justice.” L said.

“Well yes, but why?” Light asked. “It’s not like you respect the law, either. Although I’ll admit there’s a big difference between that and killing someone.”

“Do you think I’ve killed people?” L inquired, curious to know what Light thought.

“I don’t really know, have you?” Light shot back. L remained silent.

Light continued, uncaring. “I don’t think you care *oh so much* about people’s safety either, so what’s up with you?”

"...Why do you say I don't care about the law?" L asked, instead.

Light gave him a dry look that L couldn't help but feel insulted by. "Ignoring the bugging of my home without my knowledge and that time you used a criminal arrested in secrecy to bait a serial killer into murdering him on live TV, I don't know, it's just a *feeling* I get."

L didn't know how to respond to that or Light's previous question. When he'd first started the case, he could have easily said it was because it was life or death. At the time, he'd believed that since he was trying to catch Kira, the killer would stop at nothing to end him in response. Now that he couldn't justify that, what could he say about what his problem with Kira was? That crime solving was just a hobby to him? An amusement? A game of chess where Kira was his opponent?

"I observe the law when it would be bothersome not to." L said, as he thought about it. It was an occurrence that was rare these days, given the political power he had obtained long ago.

L knew enough about people, at least, to know that that wouldn't go over well with most people. But then, Light wasn't most people, was he? No, Light had just gone on about how killing people could be necessary to achieve desired ends. Light takes a dim view of treating people like tools, as L admittedly did, but he's been the only person to consistently predict L's thoughts and motivations and still claim to like him.

Although there was always the chance of any admissions he made being used against him, perhaps with Light, he could be truthful here.

"To me…" L spoke slowly. "Kira has become my Goliath. Before it was

about entertainment, then survival and now…now I can't leave the case alone. Not like this. I don't think I would be able to stop now even if I wanted to. That is why I would prefer to be cleared as soon as possible."

"You're obsessed." Light said, a small smirk tugging at his lips.

L scowled a little. "I wouldn't put it in quite those words."

"I would. You're obsessed." Light smirked wider, then it softened slightly. "But that's alright. It's like I told you before. It's okay if you're obsessed with Kira, because I'm sure the sentiment is returned. Besides, your version of obsession isn't quite as suffocating and toxic as some other people's version of obsession." At that last part, something foul and distasteful crossed Light's expression but it was gone a moment later as if it had never been there.

L would probably always find it difficult to understand how Light could make so many expressions so quickly like that. He transitioned through faces like passing shadows. And L really, truly wanted to know what - or who - Light had been thinking of to have that look, even if only for a moment.

"That's a rather ominous statement you made there. Any personal experience with that kind of thing?" L inquired, though he was sure it wouldn't get him the answer he wanted in this case.

"Would it be all that strange, given how popular I've always been at school?" Light shrugged the statement away quickly though. "No, it's just that I've seen a lot of stalking and harassment cases in the media. As bad as I think you could be with your power and your blatant disregard for the law, I can't imagine you reaching quite their level of deplorable, though."

“Deplorable?” L asked. *Particularly strong wording even with Light’s known hatred for violent criminals.*

“Deplorable.” Light nodded. “People who commit crimes like that are some of the worst.”

That reminded L of something. “You know…while Kira does take umbrage to any kind of violent crime, it does appear that they have a particular hatred towards sexually motivated crimes.”

If Light was confused by the seemingly nonsensical switch in topic, he didn’t show it. “If they did, it would be even more reason to root for Kira.” Light said, so calm that he almost appeared blank. “Only murder challenges how disgusting it is to prey on someone romantically or sexually, making them feel scared and unsafe in such a visceral way. And it’s one of the ways in which many governments fail the most to protect their people.”

L decided to take this moment to ask a hard question, the kind he probably hadn’t wanted the answer to. Perhaps Misora was right about his motivation for not pressing this particular issue, his feelings for Light were wound all throughout the question. On one level, it didn’t make sense to him. On another, maybe he didn’t want to know because..it would *mean* something. “Why is it that you side with Kira and yet you still say you like me? I should be an enemy.” L asked, finally.

Because while L had accepted long ago that Light’s feelings were impossibly genuine, he didn’t understand why the man acted on them. L himself felt uncomfortable and disoriented by his own. Why didn’t Light have a problem with this? Why did it feel like L was the only one disconcerted by his feelings for his supposed enemy?

“I’m not your enemy, L.” Light said, softly. The look in his eyes showed unadulterated honesty as he spoke. Nothing but the same softness his voice had. L *wanted* to see dishonesty but he couldn’t convince himself it was there, especially with his instincts - so pivotal in so many cases - telling him otherwise.

“Aren’t we?” L prodded forcefully, uncomfortable at asking but determined.

“No, we’re not.” Light said, simply.

“...And why not?” L asked.

“Because disagreeing about what should be done doesn’t mean we’re enemies. Because I’d rather die than hurt you.” Light said, with unwavering determination.

“Even if you’re Kira?” The words slipped from L’s mouth without conscious thought.

“Even if I’m Kira.” Light didn’t hesitate for a second. Not a second. “I’m not trying to create the perfect world, but if I was? I know that a perfect world wouldn’t exist for me without you in it.”

Chapter End Notes

I’d be interested to know what you guys thought of Light’s argument with L and how he views law enforcement and justice. It’s neither the first nor the last time Light’s gotten the chance to discuss his views, but it might be the first time I really gave him a platform to toss it back and forth with L at length.

In anime especially, I see a lot of messages and protagonists whose beliefs are to the effect of “I’ll try to save everyone, even if it’s not possible, I’ll still try!” It’s a respectable message albeit a bit overused, but it doesn’t fit Light at all. Ideologically, this is his answer to that mindset. Arguably a more cynical view, but also a mature one that I think a lot of people can relate to. Many people have been hurt terribly by someone else or seen someone they know get really hurt or maybe just have seen terrible things happen in the world at large. A lot of us know how it feels to not want to forgive someone. To just look out for ourselves and our own for a while.

Most people can’t embody that idealistic kind of optimism that I see a lot in anime even if most of us agree that it’s a good mindset to have, especially if the people that could be saved don’t appear to deserve it at all. I think between the two extremes of “everyone who opposes me is evil” and “I’ll save everyone even if everything tells me they’re a lost cause”, there’s a gray area where a lot of people live in. Where mistakes can be made. Where there’s the decisions we’re not always proud of making or the times where we didn’t do as much as we could have. Where we’re guilty of being human.

One of the things I like about Light is that protagonists in anime often reflect the best of humanity. But Light reflects us more as we see ourselves - as I see myself - as people who try our best and often fall short of the ideal. People often with good intentions and less than stellar delivery. A person can slip into evil if they lack the awareness to question themselves, instead seeing themselves as a paragon, like Light in the series did. And yet, people can still do good despite the fatal flaws we all have as people and I can really respect that.

That’s all I wanted to say. A lot more than I usually write here, I just had a brain worm I needed to get down. I often fall short of idealistic and optimistic mindsets and I appreciate having a character every once in a while who doesn't preach to me about a height I could never reach, even if I acknowledge it's a good thing.

Wheels Turn

Chapter Summary

L actually asks Light out on a date.

Chapter Notes

Having said that, I dropped another Mello scene so that I was able to get this chapter up, since it's been an uncomfortable amount of time since the last update. It'll go in the next chapter, so no worries!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Light! Light-o!!" The aforementioned Light started as his Shinigami friend barrelled into the hotel room like a bat out of hell. A death god out of Mu. Whatever.

"Is something the matter?" L asked him, clearly having clocked the way Light jumped for seemingly no reason. Light was taking a little break from crime although L was still going at it. Light was pretty sure from his time living with the guy that he didn't know what a break even was except that it was that thing that other people took.

"Just a twinge of pain from my wrist." Light quickly pasted a smile on his face and made a show of rubbing his right wrist. "Maybe it was all the typing I've been doing lately, it might be a little sore." L stared at him for a few seconds and Light waited him out.

"You should take care of that, then. We wouldn't want it to get worse." L said before turning back to his laptop.

Light let out an internal sigh of relief and gave Ryuk a sharp look out of the corner of his eye. *This had better be good,* he tried to say with his eyes. Ryuk apparently got the message.

“Sorry, Light-o! Didn’t mean to scare you, but I got big news! I found out some stuff!” Ryuk crowed, obviously excited about something.

Well, go on then. Light waited for Ryuk to speak, since he could say nothing to him with L in the room and probable security cameras.

“Okay, so! I found out why time was reset for you!” Ryuk announced, to Light’s surprise. It wasn’t that he hadn’t thought Ryuk could do it, but he knew it was a tall order to find out something like that and well, the investigation into that hadn’t panned out until now. “You’re never going to believe this! It was the Old Man himself that did it!”

Old man? What old—oh. It took him a second, but then Light recalled. Back when he was Chronos, that had been what Ryuk and a few other Shinigami used to call the Shinigami King. Chronos had always tried to be a little more respectful than that, but he hadn’t really seen the King that often so it probably didn’t matter. But… *The Shinigami King was the one who sent me back? I theorized there was something strange going on because Ryuk had said he’d never seen a Shinigami survive being turned to dust, but this is…*

It was unexpected.

After taking a quick glance at L to make sure the other man wasn’t watching him closely anymore, he flashed Ryuk a smile to say what he couldn’t without his journal in hand. *Thanks, Ryuk.*

“Surprising, right?” Ryuk crowed, flying around him. “Who would’ve thought he’d be involved? And get this! The reason why he did it is because he wants you to be his successor someday! Hear that? You could be the next Old Man! Looks like you’re still a teacher’s pet, even in the Shinigami Realm, huh?”

Ryuk's joking went in one ear and out the other as Light's mind turned over the possibilities. This was monumental new information.

Arguably, this was what he'd convinced himself he had in his first life; a free pass to do whatever he wanted given to him by a godlike being. A royal pass, for whatever it was worth. He would have to think about what he was going to do with this going forward. This opened up even more possibilities for chaos going forward.

The beautiful, unadulterated chaos!

But first, he wanted to focus on L. The man had been unusually quiet for most of the day. Well, he was always quiet, but there was something particular about it that made it feel like L was thinking hard about something he wasn't telling Light about.

~ ❹ ~

L was preparing to do the scariest thing he'd ever done in his entire career.

He was going to ask someone out on a date. Specifically, he was going to ask out Kira on a date.

L had spent the whole night biting through his thumbnails as he tossed things around in his head. It made logical sense, he reasoned to himself. He had identified that being around Light made him… happy…he found his presence pleasant. And for the time being, he wasn't actively supposed to be on the Kira Case. When he eventually did get back on the case, he might even come away with some more information to investigate after a few dates. Logically speaking, he

had no strong reasons to not ask Light out on a date.

And yet, he hesitated. For reasons that he couldn't quite ascertain. Something in his stomach somersaulted at the thought of asking Light on a date and whatever it was, it wasn't pleasant. Of course, the reaction was ridiculous. The two of them had gone to places together before and this "date" wouldn't even go that far, since Near had asked that they stay in the hotel as much as possible for the time being. So they'd basically be having their date in the hotel room they were already spending all of their time in together. It was absolutely nothing special.

Nothing special except for the fact that L had never asked anyone, nevermind Light, out on an official date before. Dating in an official capacity. It somehow made the whole thing feel more substantial than L knew it actually was. As L thought about it, he couldn't help but think about the first time he had proposed a relationship to Light and Light's baffling reaction to it.

True, at the time he had done it solely to test his boundaries with Light and to potentially manipulate him. Still, Light had refused him once on the basis of not wanting something meaningless, so he could well do it once more. L had felt nothing aside from mild confusion at the previous rejection, but the thought of Light doing it again this time made the unpleasant feeling in his stomach double in strength.

He didn't like this. Which brought up the question of why he was bothering in the first place, a question that didn't have an immediately obvious answer. So instead, L's thoughts swirled around and around in his head without a resolution, tormenting him all night. There were a few times in L's life where he wished he knew of a way to shut his brain off, just to give himself some peace. This was one of those times.

By the time morning came around and Light started to stir, L decided that his mind would give him no peace until he successfully convinced

Light to go out on a date with him. An official date. Depending on how it went, he might not have to do much convincing, but at least by the end of it L would finally have some kind of resolution and maybe then he could get some work done.

If Light's peculiar insight into his character let him know that there was something on L's mind when he woke up, he didn't mention it. Instead, once Light woke up, he disappeared into the adjoining bathroom and L ordered their breakfasts to be brought up to their room. Thankfully for his sanity and what was left of his reputation, L didn't need to follow Light into the bathroom since it was laden with security cameras and Watari was the one who reviewed the footage.

It had only been a few days and yet their morning routine almost felt practiced already. Light came out of the bathroom less than a minute before their breakfasts arrived and he picked them up at the door, bringing them in to L rather than letting Watari bring them in.

Light favored a breakfast of coffee, fruit yogurt, some toast, and an apple. L's breakfast that morning were strawberry pancakes with whipped cream on top. It occurred to L that morning as they ate their breakfasts in comfortable silence that Light didn't really comment on L's rather large sugar intake. L estimated that natural or refined sugars made up roughly 85% of his diet. It worked well for him but he was aware that others considered it abnormal. Especially given the very normal and healthy breakfast that Light was eating, he could imagine that Light especially should have something to say about him having sugary foods even for breakfast. Some kind of comment.

But he didn't. Light had handed him his breakfast with perfect nonchalance and focused on eating his own without a word. It wasn't that unusual, L told himself. Pancakes were a common breakfast item in England, even if not necessarily in Japan. It didn't mean Light was being thoughtful of him.

Still, L considered. It was nice having someone around who didn't

look at him strangely for all the sugar he ate and who would even join him in his snacking on occasion. And it was nice having someone who didn't expect L to talk and who he didn't have to speak carefully around. Light challenged L but he never made him feel judged for who he was. He never felt like he was failing to live up to an unspoken set of requirements when Light was around.

Asking Light out didn't mean anything at all, L reasoned to himself. He knew Light liked him and he'd already acknowledged to himself that Misora was right about him needing to confront this overly complicated thing between him and Light.

"Your thoughts are so loud, I can hear your gears grinding from all the way over here." Light's voice shook L out of his musings and he glanced over to where Light was sitting on his bed. Light was already looking at him, his features a mix of humor and curiosity. "Yen for your thoughts?"

Right. Light was sitting right there because he always was these days. They were practically chained together for the time being. Yet another reason why asking him out officially *shouldn't* be a big deal. He'll just tell Light they should have a date in their hotel room or maybe that cafe Light keeps taking him to and that will be the end of that. Surely.

L couldn't get his mouth to open. That was weird.

If anything, Light's expression became even more amused at L's continued silence. A good thing, L supposed. He'd rather that than Light get frustrated or angry at him for not answering him.

"The silent treatment, huh?" Light smiled. "How about we work on the case, then? We don't *have* to talk while we do it. If I'm not wrong, you're mulling over the case anyway since you've been staring off into space for the last half hour."

Ah, right. After their latest argument, the two had managed to find a case to work on together without the conflict of Kira…besides the obvious one, anyway. They hadn't solved it yet, but it was the case of a school teacher accused of murdering a coworker.

Although L would never admit it, he was grateful for the distraction and agreed to it easily. "That sounds like a good use of time."

"Oh, he speaks!" Light crowed jokingly before settling down. "Come on over, then. I already have it pulled up on my computer. You can carry yours over, too."

L did exactly that, stepping carefully onto the bed with his laptop and settled into a crouch on the bed so the two were sitting side-by-side. L leaned slightly over into Light's personal space bubble so that he could see what Light had presumably been doing on his computer for the last half hour or so. His screen was split between six different pages, each relating to the individual in question or the victim. Except for one photo that L didn't recognize.

"I think it was the principal." Light said, seemingly nonsensically.

"Why do you think that?" Because L hadn't considered the principal of the school in the case. He hadn't been seen anywhere near the school and his name hadn't even been mentioned in any of the reports. Not even the suspect pointed the finger at the principal.

"There was a report a few years back about a fight between the victim and the principal. In their interviews about the incident, the two deliberately try to downplay the severity of the fight, but it was apparently pretty serious, especially since the police ended up being called about it."

“That’s it?” L asked, disbelievingly. “A fight the principal and the victim had years ago in which the police were called?”

“There *was* a physical altercation.” Light defended. “You’re not exactly the most conventional detective, either. You go on gut feelings and scant evidence, too.”

“Are you saying that you have a gut feeling that the principal is behind this?” L inquired.

Light nodded. “I know the suspect is innocent. Something about the way she behaved leading up to the death of her coworker and then again during the interview. She didn’t act like someone who was planning something and in the interview, she reeked of someone who had no idea how she had gotten there. If she’d committed the murder, she would’ve had a plan.”

“Unless it was a crime of passion. Perhaps they were having an affair.” L said, playing Devil’s advocate.

“While also getting rid of the evidence on her clothing and the murder weapon but still coming back to be caught at the scene of the crime?” Light asked, incredulously.

L hummed in agreement. He, too, had been certain of the suspect’s innocence, but he wasn’t as convinced of the principal of the school’s guilt.

Almost as if he sensed that without L having to say anything, Light continued to justify. “There’s something that strikes me about that year's old police report. Even though a long time passed between this

and that, I feel like they have to be connected."

"Do you think the principal planned this murder years in advance?" L asked.

"Wouldn't be the first time that someone did that." Light said, evasively. Then, "I'm not sure yet. I just know where I want to look now and it's at this guy." Light pointed at the man's photo on his screen.

Light paused. "I could use your help." He offered, gently. The tone tugged something in L's chest.

"There is also something that I could use your advice about." L said, determined not to second guess this particular action. "It isn't in regard to either of our cases."

Light gave a surprised hum. "You've never asked me for advice on something outside of the Kira Case before." He noted.

Had he really not? L turned it around in his head. He couldn't recall a specific time when he had done so, but that made sense. He didn't ask for outside opinions often and he couldn't see asking his main suspect for advice ending any better than one might expect. "Well, I want to do it now, if you don't mind."

"Yeah, sure, okay." Light shrugged. "What about?"

L didn't dare draw in a breath as he said the words. "I would like to know how I should go about asking someone out on a date."

“A date?” Light jerked around to look at him in shock. “That…wasn’t what I was expecting, to be honest. By a date, you mean like an actual date?”

Sometimes Light’s thought process could be so confusing. What date would L have meant by “date” if not that kind?? “A romantic rendezvous. Yes, that.” L acknowledged, watching Light’s reaction carefully.

“Why would you want to do a thing like that?” Light asked. The look on his face said he was trying to seem as if he didn’t care and yet he looked unhappy.

“You said that you believed I could become close to people. Maybe I want to test that.” L reminded him.

“Yes, I suppose that’s true.” Light acknowledged with a troubled expression, but no advice was forthcoming.

“If I asked someone else out, would you kill them?” L inquired, thinking he’d hit upon the reason for Light’s sudden discomfort. Though he had no personal experience with love or romance, he’d seen the bad ending of both play out hundreds of times in his life. Lovers killing people together, someone killing their lover in rage or in jealousy or killing their old lover’s new partner. L couldn’t always understand the emotions that drove such actions, but he knew the motivations and the end results.

“What a question to ask!” Light barked out a laugh before calming himself. “Just out of curiosity, if I said ‘yes’, would you dangle an innocent person’s life in front of me again to see if I’d actually do it?”

L fell into silence. He wasn't going to answer that.

Light huffed out another laugh at his continued silence. "That's just as well, I think I already know the answer. But no, I wouldn't do something to someone innocent like that just because you're a jerk."

L chose to ignore the last comment. "What *would* you do?"

"Be hurt." Light shrugged, as if the admission was nothing. L didn't find it so easy to be honest with others and he had much experience with people to know that many wouldn't be able to admit to emotional pain so easily.

"And that's it?" L pressed the matter.

"And that's it." Light said simply, still with the same expression. This was one of many times that L wished he understood Light more…like Light seemed to understand him.

He was also displeased by the answer the younger man had given him. He couldn't tell whether that was because - if truthful - it deprived him of a way to agitate Light into action or if it was for some other reason. "Well, I'm sure you'll be happy to hear that you don't need to be hurt. I'm not planning to ask anyone else out on a date." He murmured.

"Hold on, wait." Light said, giving him a strange look. At least he wasn't looking upset anymore. "Are you asking me for advice on how to ask *me* out?" He asked with raised eyebrows.

"…perhaps." L reluctantly replied, unable to come up with a way in

which that phrasing was inaccurate.

L watched as Light stared at him in blank surprise for a few more seconds, then almost in slow motion, his lips started to twitch a little and then he was laughing. Was it something he did?

“Sorry. I’m sorry.” Light apologized, still laughing, when he saw L just watching him laugh. “It’s just that that’s so you, L. I don’t know anyone else who would ask the person they want to date advice on how to ask themselves out.”

“Are you mocking me?” L didn’t feel mocked, but he felt the need to check.

“No, no.” Light shook his head, still smiling. His eyes were glowing softly with mirth. “It’s cute.”

Cute? L was…cute to him? That was entirely opposite to the comments that most had to make about him and his behavior. By Light’s own admission, Light considered L to be a manipulative liar - not unlike himself. What about him could possibly be cute, then?

Light continued to baffle.

“So?” L inquired, collecting himself.

“So, what?” Light asked, blinking.

“Since it’s out in the open now, I suppose I no longer need the advice.

I'd like to have your answer." L reminded him.

Light gave another blink and then a slow, cat-like smile spread across his face. "My answer to what? You didn't ask a question."

This little— "I'll ask you not to play dumb. You know what I want to ask." L said, annoyed.

If possible, Light's grin widened even further. "Hmm…do I?" He tilted his head to the side.

" *Yes,* you do." L insisted stubbornly, not ready to lose.

"Are you telling me that the greatest detective in the world can't even do this?" Light teased him with a wide grin.

Even as L knew he was baiting him, he couldn't help but feel his hackles rise at the challenge. "I…want us to have…an official date." He said haltingly, gritting his teeth so as to not lose his nerve.

Light's grin widened exponentially. "An 'official' date, huh?" L didn't have to dig deep, the enjoyment was radiating from him. Whatever Light must've read of his emotions immediately made Light raise his hands in a mock surrender. "Alright, alright. Enough teasing. I'd love to go out with you, L." The boy's tone took a softer turn near the end.

Strangely, the tension in L's stomach let go instantly at the agreement. L really didn't understand why he had felt stressed about it, he knew Light had feelings for him. It didn't make any sense and L wasn't unused to feeling this kind of nonsense.

“Soooo,” Light trilled, playfully. “Where are we going?”

“We’re staying here.” L said, decisively. “The goal of staying in this hotel room is so that we can be monitored by a third party. It isn’t a good idea to simply take off into town all of the time.”

“Have to make sure we don’t do anything shady.” Light smiled, unbothered by the restriction. “Fine, we can have the date here. We’ll have something to eat. It isn’t like we haven’t done that before, but at least this one will be ‘official’.” Light teased.

The younger man sat up. “But in exchange, I’d like to visit back home. It’s been a while since I’ve seen my sister and my mom and since they’re not allowed to come here…”

L didn’t really want to agree but at the same time, Light wasn’t exactly a captive here. The college student was here because he chose to be and the moment he decided he didn’t want to be supervised or attached to L’s side anymore, he could just up and leave. It wasn’t like he could force the other man to not visit his home if he didn’t want to and with him insisting on having their first official date still inside their hotel room, he he didn’t have any leverage to bargain for it.

L sighed. “I don’t want your family to know what my face looks like.”

“What?” Light cocked an eyebrow. “Afraid one of *them* is Kira now?”

“That’s unlikely.” L replied. “But I am still trying to make sure my identity remains a secret, you are aware. It’s dangerous to have people outside of my small circle knowing what I look like. There are innumerable people who would want to see the detective L dead.”

Light's expression shifted to discomfort at that statement and L once again felt baffled by the continual confirmation that Light didn't want him dead, despite being the most reasonable claimant in the world on L's life.

"In that case, maybe Watari can drive us to the house and you can wait in the car while I go inside. The windows are tinted, right?" L didn't respond. Light knew that they were. "I'll be quick. Thirty minutes max."

"I suppose that's acceptable." L would have to be alright with that. It wasn't as if he believed that he would be able to catch Light at anything after he'd had cameras set up in the other man's home for over a month without finding evidence.

Light's expression brightened up considerably. "Thanks, L! You're the best!" He happily exaggerated. Then in a surprise move, he reached forward and placed his hand on L's shoulder, squeezing it affectionately before letting go and smiling at him for a moment. "Now, let's play around with this case. I know who the killer is. Help me prove it."

L didn't say anything about it, but the spot on his shoulder where Light squeezed felt warm for the next hour.

~ ❻ ~

Misa had begun to suspect that she was being lied to a little bit ago.

It hadn't been long since she started to get that feeling, but it still hadn't gone away. She'd begun to wonder if the woman she was meeting was *actually* Kira. The longer they talked, the less she seemed to like it.

She didn't feel like she shared the same ideals that both Misa and the real Kira did. It took Misa a while to notice it, but the woman looked unhappy whenever talking about Kira's ideals with Misa. She'd seen that same look on people on the news who talked about how wrong or evil Kira was or how criminal their actions were, even if she didn't say that.

At first, Misa had been so excited to meet Kira!

…but the excitement cooled the longer they spent together, the less she felt like she was actually meeting Kira.

She didn't like the idea of being suspicious of her precious Kira, but if they really weren't who they said they were, then she needed to know! So Misa thought of how to test it. The only way she could think of was to try and pressure her into killing someone in front of her or accurately predicting someone who would die. Would that work? What if she really was Kira but she refused to perform for Misa's sake.

Misa shook her head. No. She had to have some kind of proof, otherwise she hadn't managed to reach her goal at all and she was being played! By who, she didn't know. If this woman wasn't Kira or L, then she didn't know who she was at all. She was tired of having her offers of help brushed aside by someone who couldn't even prove who they were!

"…Is there something wrong?" The older woman asked, peering at Misa in concern.

Taking a deep breath, Misa steadied herself and went for it. "Actually, there is!" She said before she could back out of it. "I want proof that you're Kira!" Okay, so maybe she didn't need to do it that directly. Oh

well, it was out now.

The woman's eyes went wide and Misa thought that she paled a little, but she couldn't be sure. "You…want me to prove it?"

"And why not? It's a perfectly reasonable thing to ask for!" Misa was trying to convince herself with that just as much as the other woman.

The other woman dropped into silence for a while. Misa didn't know for how long, but it felt like forever and she fidgeted nervously as she waited for an answer.

"…what would you have me do to prove it?" The other woman asked eventually.

Misa almost let out a sigh of relief that Kira(?) wasn't angry at her. "Predict someone who's going to die." She said with confidence. "If you do that and they die, I'll fully believe that you're Kira and I won't ask for proof again."

Another silence. "You realize that human lives aren't a game to play around with, don't you? Do you understand how disrespectful it would be if I killed someone just to prove to you that I can? Do you understand how wrong that is?" She asked, her tone dark.

"I get that, but you can just tell me the name of someone you were planning to execute anyway! You won't need to kill someone just to prove it to me." Misa explained. The third silence that resulted from her statement made that same suspicion that had been building up over the weeks curdle in her gut. "What's the problem?"

“I…suppose I can do that.” The woman cleared her throat and straightened up. “But I will need some time to come up with someone appropriate.”

“Why can’t you just give me a name now?” Misa pressed. “Surely you have someone in mind.”

“As you know, I don’t kill at a quick pace.” The raven haired woman said. Misa nodded, she knew that well. “I like to put good thought into each person I get rid of. If you don’t want me to feel pressured to kill someone that I wasn’t going to to begin with, then I need time to come up with my next victim. Please be patient and I will have someone prepared by our next meeting.”

Misa felt unsatisfied with not having the name that very day, but there was something about the authority that Kira(?) spoke with that made her suppress those anxious feelings. “And you promise you’ll have someone for me to look forward to next time we see each other? And that it’ll be soon?”

“Yes.” The woman agreed immediately. “Your patience will be rewarded, don’t you worry.”

Misa brightened up at that. Yes, that’s right! If this really was Kira, then her patience and her dedication would be rewarded! “Yes, of course! I can be patient! I can wait until our next meeting.”

And, she promised quietly to herself, that was as long as she would wait for her proof. She wasn’t going to let herself be blown off anymore for fear of upsetting Kira. If this person wasn’t Kira, then her efforts to uncover the truth would be rewarded, too.

Mello spent several anxious hours with Matt trying to distract him while he waited for Watari to get back to him with whether or not he managed to get any surviving footage. He gnawed his way through several bars of chocolate anxiously before finally getting word from Watari and was able to let out a sigh of relief at the positive response.

Watari managed to get footage from three different video cameras. When he received the footage, he was quick to identify where each camera was placed relative to each other. The street where the truck "accident" occurred was of particular interest to him and thankfully the cameras covered that area. Two of the camera feeds had a view of the street where the accident happened and one overlooked the street that turned onto it. Mello left that last one alone for the moment. If he couldn't get anything he wanted from the more promising cameras, he'd come back to that one.

That left two cameras with footage from that night and it was night. The incident occurred well past sunset and even though there were street lights, the scene wasn't well lit. Mello quickly found that the individuals in both videos weren't very visible. In fact, one of the two videos clearly came from a camera of much worse quality than the other.

Mello cursed in his head. *Damn, why can't these cheap bastards just shell out for a better camera?* The whole recording from that camera was pretty much useless, with the bad lighting and the grainy footage quality.

With an annoyed snort, he turned all of his attention to analyzing the other camera's recordings. The recording he got from that night stretched from three hours before the accident to three hours afterwards. Very little, if any, of that extra footage on each end would probably prove to be useful, it was probably just Watari being meticulous. It was what they were taught at Wammy's House. You had to pay attention to everything, especially if it didn't seem important. The lack of attention to detail was why the police were so useless.

Mello pushed down the small amount of nausea he felt when he watched the man get run over by a truck. He still didn't have much experience in violent crime yet, although he did have some.

He shook his head. He would need to get used to it as quickly as possible! If he was going to beat Near, he couldn't afford to have a weakness like that! It would only stop him from being able to do his job properly.

It was okay. He could do this.

Mello watched the video several more times. For the first couple times, he focused solely on the main action. The assault on the woman, the short chase, and the crash. Then, he moved onto rewatching the video with focus shifting on different parts of the footage. He was looking for details that might not be as apparent on a first watch.

He had to keep his eyes on one area for the duration of the rewatch because there was the potential for something to show up on-screen for only a fraction of a second. If he wasn't watching a particular spot, he could miss it. He wasn't sure what "it" was yet, maybe "it" was his big break. Or just something innocuous happening on the edge of the action.

Any boredom that flashed through him, he quickly silenced as he forced himself to focus on the footage again and again. Then, during one of the rewatches, he saw something. At first, not seeming overly important but still notable.

He could see through one of the windows of a nearby store, one right in front of the action. And someone was standing in the store, right in

front of the window.

Probably watching everything go down, Mello thought to himself as he tried to get a better angle on the person. He couldn't write it off without looking into it, they'd taught him that much. He'd try to get a good look at them and try to ID them if he could.

Looks like a guy… Mello thought, squinting at the footage and leaning forward.

"Don't get too close, you'll ruin your eyesight." Matt droned, not looking up from his game.

"You're one to talk about that." Mello scoffed, leaning even closer to the screen just to spite him. "You've probably been told that a dozen times by now."

"Which is why it's nice to be able to say it to someone else." Matt replied, unbothered.

Mello would often feel a tinge of annoyance when he tried to get under his friend's skin only for him to shake it off so easily. But then, it was that same calm and removed attitude that made him Mello's best friend. Not everyone could hang around him with his more fiery personality without pissing him off more or getting turned off by it.

Pointedly ignoring that last comment, Mello tried again to get a better look at the guy. This time, he zoomed in on the footage as much as he could without losing too much video quality. Sadly, it was a tradeoff.

The person looked like he was writing in something that he was holding in his hands. A journal or something. He didn't look like he

even saw what was happening right in front of him outside. Mello scoffed and reclined back in his seat. People could be so unobservant sometimes.

Mello was just about to dismiss the person as an unimportant factor when he turned to another of his myriad computer screens and caught something out of the corner of his eyes. It was one of the screens that had a page of the few people that were ever considered possible Kiras during the life of the case. Specifically, the picture of Light Yagami.

Mello looked back to the frozen, grainy picture on-screen. Details were very hard to pick up, but looking between the two screens, he thought that the hair looked very similar. The hair looked very light… could've been light brown or dirty blonde…and the haircut was similar. The height and build could've been about right…

Mello's heart started to beat rapidly. *That totally looks like him!* "Hey! Get off your butt and look at this!" He yelled, grabbing Matt and pushing him towards the screen.

"What?! Geez, man, you almost made me drop my game!!" Matt objected as he staggered forward.

"Forget about the game! We're on a mission! Look, look at this." Mello asserted, pointing at the screen.

"Look at what?" Matt asked, frustrated. But he did put down the game.

Mello groaned loudly. "This!" He jabbed his left finger right onto the grainy character on the one screen and then jabbed his right ringer on the character bio of Light on the other screen.

Matt obligingly glanced at the clearer image and then leaned a little closer to try and get a good look at the grainier image. A few seconds passed with him looking at the picture with furrowed brow and then he pulled back and gave Mello a weird look. He didn't have to wonder for long what the look was about. "Are you trying to say this is the same guy in both photos?"

"It is!" Mello scoffed, having become fully convinced of this.

"The picture isn't even that clear!" Matt argued in disbelief. "The only thing that we can compare is the hair. Sure it looks a little similar, but we can't even tell for sure what color it is in that video. This could easily be a completely different person!"

Mello felt frustration well up inside him that his best friend didn't see what he saw. "That's just the video quality and the distance. I'm sure this is the guy. If the store he was in had still had their footage, we'd be able to prove it!"

"Are you sure you're not just latching onto him because L had been focused on him?" Matt asked, proving that he had been paying at least some attention. He sounded exhausted with this already.

"No, I'm not!" Mello exploded. "I wasn't even paying him any special attention until I saw this picture!" He once again jabbed his finger at the grainy man with a journal in the store window. He caught Matt giving him a skeptical look. "I wasn't! Does it really surprise you that L might've been *right?!* " Mello demanded in righteous indignation on L's behalf. L was a great man! The best detective in the world!

Mello could remember sitting on the floor in the rec room at Wammy's with the other kids, listening to one of L's rare lectures

about how he solved crime. He remembered the awe he always felt as he listened to the man who represented his entire goal in life. L was everything he was taught to be and listening to him helped Mello get even just that little bit closer to reaching his level. And one step closer to beating Near at his own game.

"Fine! Let's say it's the same guy. What then? That piece of shit video isn't gonna be good enough to convince anyone. It barely counts as evidence. It's not like you're any closer to solving the case after having seen it."

Mello actually stopped to think about that. He'd gotten so excited at seeing the person in the video resemble one of the existing suspects in the Kira Case that he didn't think about what he was going to do next. Matt was kind of right. Mello thought it would be stupid to write off the similarities in the pictures as just a coincidence - especially with light colored hair as unusual as it was in Japan - but it really wasn't enough to convince anyone of the connection. Mello felt that L would see what he was getting at, but that wasn't going to help L.

They might even hand the information off to Near to look into if he's not careful. That would get Near the glory if he managed to solve the case with *his* information. No, it would be better to solve the case entirely by himself. He didn't have enough information on his own, so what did he do next?

Mello's head popped up as he got an idea. He jumped onto his computer and pulled up Light Yagami's information, quickly finding his home address.

"What? What are you doing now?" Matt's tired voice called out behind him.

"I got his home address." Mello answered him.

“Okay…and what does that — wait.” Matt suddenly sounded a little panicked, but he didn’t pay any real attention to it. “Are you just going to show up at the guy’s house?!”

“You really know me too well.” Mello muttered, scribbling the address down on a piece of paper and standing up.

“But he’s not even going to be there!” Matt asserted. “You know where he is right now!”

“Exactly. Which means this is my best bet to get some information without him interfering. It would be more risky if he was at home.” Mello insisted, heading out. “So are you just going to stay here and complain to yourself or are you coming with me?”

“This is reckless.” Matt muttered, suddenly exhausted again. Still, he tossed his game into his bag, slung it across his shoulder, and followed Mello.

“No guts, no glory!” Mello announced, dramatically. Then in a serious tone, he added. “I’m at a disadvantage right now. If I’m not willing to take risks, I’m never going to win. Taking risks is the one thing I can do that Near can’t.”

Matt looked at his friend’s back as he followed him out and couldn’t help but feel a little sad for him. He knew how wounded his friend was, deep down. He wasn’t like Matt, who didn’t care about most things. Mello cared alright, he cared a lot.

“Alright, then.” Matt sighed, forcing a relaxed smile on his face. His friend wouldn’t take kindly to any whiff of pity. “Let’s go.”

Chapter End Notes

I really love writing in different people's perspectives. It opens up a lot more possibilities for storytelling, but the best thing about it is that I can play around with limited viewpoints and unreliable narrators! It's really fun to write things that are clearly biased or truthfully dubious but said as if they were fact.

Home, Sweet Home

Chapter Summary

> Light's visit to his sister doesn't turn out…anything like he planned.

Chapter Notes

> Hi, All! This chapter is super late! ^v^ Life has been a trip and a half, I'll tell you that! Graduating from college and completing my onboarding for a new job will do that, but I'm here now and I have a chapter!

Ryuk followed Light and that Matsuda guy in the car as he drove Light to his house to check up on his sister. The Shinigami had been surprised that L hadn't insisted on coming with Light but the detective seemed almost desperate to get some alone time. Ryuk didn't know the detective nearly well enough to figure out why that was, but whatever happened, L had insisted that someone else could take Light on a short trip to his house and he would take the opportunity to meet with Near.

He hadn't said that last part…to Light, but Ryuk had overheard him speaking to Watari about meeting with Near away from Light during that time. Even Ryuk couldn't miss L's sour expression though when Light's dad proposed that Matsuda should be the one to escort Light. Ryuk normally would've stayed behind in the hotel and spied on Near and L's conversation for Light, but there was this niggling feeling that made him restlessly follow Light to his house.

Ryuk had been getting the feeling that he'd forgotten something and it had progressively gotten worse as they moved further away from the hotel.

He thought about it even as he followed Light down the path from the street to his house. It was getting super irritating, that nagging feeling like he'd forgotten to do something. Something he was supposed to

tell Light-o? That felt right but he wasn't sure what about. He couldn't think of what it was, though. He'd told him the most important thing he'd found out that day, about the Shinigami King bringing Light back and everything. So what could this itch in his brain be about?

He couldn't shake it off…something he was forgetting…

Wait, didn't something happen before he took off to the Shinigami Realm? Yeah, now that he thought about it, something had definitely happened before that. What had he been doing? Ah, he was listening in on the old guy and he was talking to someone about--

Ryuk's wings stalled in the air as the memory jarred loose, just as Light opened his front door and went in. *Right!* Ryuk thought as he quickly flew in after Light. *I should tell Light about--*

Ryuk almost flew into Light as the brunette was standing frozen in the point of the house where the hallway led into the living room. Peering past him to see what was affecting him so much, Ryuk first caught sight of Light's sister sitting on the floor in front of the TV watching one of her usual romantic dramas…and then he caught sight of a strange kid he didn't know sitting on the floor next to her but he wasn't looking at the TV.

Upon hearing their entrance into the living area, the boy had turned around and was now looking at Light with wide, caught eyes. It didn't seem like he was a boy from Sayu's school with how surprised he was to see her family in the house, but then who the heck--

"Oh! Light! You're back!" Sayu finally realized they were there and leapt up from the floor to run over and hug her brother. Light didn't react at all, still staring at that boy in horrified shock. Sayu smiled and gestured to the boy behind her. "This is a boy whose family just moved in down the street. His name is Mello!"

The Shinigami could've slapped himself for not recognizing the kid as much as he recognized the name. His eyes swiveled to the side to look in concern at Light.

Oh.

~ ❶ ~

"Moved in…down the street?" Light felt his lips form the words but he felt entirely numb. It was like his brain was running on autopilot while he was coming to terms with the situation he'd just stepped into. That was probably for the best, though. He had so much experience putting on fronts and hiding how he actually felt that he could do it even when his mind was going a mile a minute.

Light was unprepared for this confrontation. Not just for that day, but ever.

He might've thought that if he played his cards right, he'd never have to see this person again. He'd only been summoned after a series of spiraling events, after all. Avoidance had never been Light's forté – more like aggressively direct confrontation – but this person was his own category.

Mello. One of the people he had been least interested in seeing again. Light could've forgiven the younger man for going against him in a past life and for foiling his plans, as he'd done with everyone else. What he couldn't simply sweep under the rug in the name of forgiving and forgetting was Mello's treatment of his little sister.

Questionable involvement with brutal criminal organizations

notwithstanding, Sayu had done *nothing* wrong. Her only crime was being related to people involved in the Kira investigation. And for that she was kidnapped, her life was threatened, and she was left traumatized. Mello then killed her father and assisted in Light's eventual downfall.

Life was rarely fair but to Sayu, Light now felt that it had been especially cruel.

Even though Light took responsibility for what his actions had directly and indirectly caused, he couldn't bring himself to absolve Mello of all of his own fault in the matter. He couldn't just wipe away the resentment he felt towards Mello.

Or…Mihael Keehl , Light thought to himself as he gazed at the name fluttering above the young boy's head. The young boy who had just a moment ago been sitting on the ground *next to his sister!*

And just *what* was he doing in Light's *house?* …Well, the answer to that seemed obvious. There was no way this was any kind of coincidence, especially considering the obvious lies he had told his sister about moving in nearby. What fresh bullshit.

But then what *was* he doing in the house, talking to his sister. For that matter, what was he even doing in the country? Whatever the reason for his existence in Japan was, Light was 100% ready to blame L for it.

Before that though, he needed to deal with this situation. He could get Mello out of the house easily enough, but keeping him away from his sister wasn't so simple. He could tell his sister to stay away from that boy but she would just wave him off as an overprotective older brother because he couldn't explain to her about Mello's role in the Kira case and he definitely couldn't explain to her how he knew Mello

was involved in the case.

Because the little jerk was involved in this case now, Light was damn sure of it. It was way too early and Light would have to investigate that butterfly effect later on, but he was involved.

And because Light had suggested that he and L be attached to the hip until Near is satisfied in his innocence, he was barely home to keep an eye on the situation. Light groaned inside the safety of his mind. *I didn't expect that move to backfire like this.*

Normally, if Light identified someone as a threat, he would do his best to endear himself to them. It was his usual M.O. this time around, but he didn't feel comfortable doing it this time. He just felt like Mello was too dangerous for that to work on him. He didn't know much about Mello and to be honest, he could count on one hand the number of times he'd interacted with the younger man even indirectly, but he could still remember the sheer aggression. How angry and cold the guy always seemed.

In some ways, that coldness was similar to how L and Near came across, but also hugely different in a way that made Light's nerves flare up rather than his protective instincts. Those two came across as cold in a reserved and uncaring way most of the time, even if he knew that deep down they really just needed people that cared about them. Mello's coldness came across a white-hot. A rage so potent that he hated everyone and everything, in his own way. Whatever calm he had always looked like it was belying something simmering under the surface, barely held down.

Light didn't know if he could guess at where that kind of anger could've come from or if he himself had ever been that kind of perpetually angry…but in some ways he felt himself empathizing anyway. Even as he grew nervous in the boy's presence and just wanted him to go away already…it wasn't in his nature to just write someone off by saying they had that kind of anger because they were

a monstrous person. Maybe he was monstrous, maybe he wasn't.

But if Mello was turned into someone monstrous due to intense, soul-penetrating anger or any other factor, then Light couldn't help but wonder…what made him that way?

Light took a deep breath. He couldn't befriend Mello like he was used to doing with most people. No, but he could and would draw his attention towards himself and away from Sayu. He was sure that he was the reason Mello was here anyway and it was probably the only way he could be reasonably sure that Mello would stay away from Sayu after this. He would have no reason to hurt her if his real target made himself available to him–

Stop it, Light forcefully reminded himself. *He's a child right now.* Which was true. The young adult that had done all of those things was now a child around Sayu's age and while Light knew better than to judge someone's capabilities based on their appearance, the child version was more limited in their mental and physical capabilities than his adult self. He shouldn't assume that Mello would be willing to hurt Sayu at this age just because his older version had gone and joined the Mafia.

Forcing himself to slow down a little, Light raised an eyebrow and pretended to be skeptical at Mello's presence. "Should I tell Dad about you sneaking a boy into the house?" It was unusually difficult to make his voice sound joking, wound up as he was; tight as a spring.

"Don't even think about it!" Sayu shrieked, darting out of the hug and hitting him playfully on the chest. "Dad doesn't need to know about this! Nothing's going on, anyway! I'm just making friends in the neighborhood."

Before Light could respond, Mello interjected. "Hi. You must be Sayu's

older brother, Light. I'm new around here. You think you could help me get the lay of the land?" He asked far more casually than L or Near ever could, leaning back on his elbows.

Of course. Light scoffed mentally, even as his expression stayed the same. *New around here. That's why you don't look Japanese and have a different accent and yet you speak the language perfectly. Nothing weird about that.*

Just the sound of his voice brought back bad memories. Light forced a calm smile on his face but he wasn't sure it reached his eyes. "I suppose, as the son of the Chief of Police, it's my duty to help out the neighborhood kids." That declaration got two very different responses.

"Light! Don't scare him." Sayu scolded him, hands on her hips.

"Your dad is the Japanese Chief of Police?" Mello grinned. He was probably trying to look excited but he didn't have the acting skills to look like the kid he was rather than a mini detective looking for information. Light pretended not to notice.

"Sure is." Light said, grinning. "Want to hear all about it?"

"Oh, I want to know *everything.* " Mello said, leaning forward.

"Uh, Light?" Sayu whispered to him, sounding confused and a little panicked.. "You know we're not supposed to talk about Dad's work. What're you doing?"

Light hummed under his breath and then hugged here, burying his

head in her hair to hide the fact that his lips were moving from Mello as he replied. “Just trust me, Okay? I know what I'm doing.”

Light had spent so much time looking after Sayu, watching over and mentoring her. If he could trade in on some of that trust, he wanted to do it now.

Sayu didn't reply immediately, but it only took a few long seconds before she responded to him. “Okay. I'll trust you, Big Brother.”

Light felt a smile tug on his lips before releasing Sayu from the hug. Sayu made an excuse to go to the kitchen, leaving the two men alone. Light noted with mild surprise that Mello didn't drop the act the second Sayu was gone.

“So. Tell me about your dad.” Mello said, casually.

And to think I was looking forward to getting to spend some time with my sister, Light mourned. He walked closer, ignoring his own discomfort in the process, and sat down on the couch nearer to where Mello was reclining on the floor.

“Well, what do you want to hear? I imagine hearing about his workload wouldn't be particularly interesting to a kid, would it?” Light asked.

“Oh, you would be surprised.” Mello smirked like he thought he knew something that Light didn't. He probably did think that.

And that was how Light found himself sharing small talk with a young Mello about his father’s career. It was actually boring how Light found

himself answering mundane questions about his dad and his career and things like that. At some point, Ryuk broke off from them to float around the house. Probably to find some more interesting things to do. Thankfully, it seemed that Mello was as impatient as they were to get to the actual reason for the conversation.

"It must be hard having a dad with such a dangerous job." Mello said at one point.

"Well, I think I've actually done something pretty cool." Mello said with something in his eyes that wasn't actually excitement. Something sly and knowing. It kind of felt like a childish attempt at the looks L would sometimes give him, where he was trying to hint that he knew something Light didn't want him to know. "I think I caught Kira on video. It was a camera inside a convenience store when the leader of a motorcycle gang got hit by a truck. It wasn't considered a Kira kill but I think this is proof that it is."

Light blinked and he could have slapped himself. He remembered that time. It had been just after he'd found himself in his past. He hadn't oriented himself in time and space yet. He remembered mostly being agitated and anxious. He hadn't done anything he didn't do the first time for the first day, he thought, but apparently that didn't matter with all the other things he'd changed.

No one looked into the deaths of those scummy thugs last time, even after they realized what region of Japan I was in, Light sulked. It wasn't like he even killed them differently than he had originally, but that wasn't what mattered.

He'd been caught on camera. The realization sent several thoughts flying through Light's head, but the one that really caught his attention was: why hadn't the kid gone straight to L? Surely, that would've been the most intelligent and reasonable option. It was incredibly dangerous for a kid to confront someone he suspected of being Kira by himself. Why not tell L?

Maybe he did, the thought came to him abruptly. Maybe he did and L knew that he would be here when Light went in and all this being able to visit his sister business was just him playing into their trap - no. Light was the one who'd brought up seeing his sister, not L. And why jump Light at his house where he barely ever was those days when they *knew* where he'd been staying and had easy access to him. They would have had more control over the situation having Mello jump him somewhere in the hotel.

Yes, as he asked himself these questions, his mind calmed and he was able to focus better. Even if he needed to consider it as a remote possibility, L knowing about this didn't make a lot of sense with what he knew. Limited though it was, at the moment. What was the kid doing here then, if he didn't have L's approval? What even *was* the plan?

"Uh, Light?" Ryuk said carefully, floating back into the room and landing behind him.

Light hummed sharply under his breath for the Shinigami to continue, the other's uncharacteristic hesitance putting him on edge.

"Another kid must've snuck in before we got here. He's up in your room…snooping."

Light couldn't stop his body from jerking sharply at the information. *What?* There were *two* of them there? And the other one was crawling around his room! *Shit!* So that was the game, huh? Distract him down there while his friend found something incriminating in Light's room.

At least this told Light what the plan was and it told him something else. No matter what Mello might have implied, the video captured

from the surveillance camera - if it even existed - was nowhere near conclusive. Otherwise, he *would've* gone to L. The fact that he and his little friend were here, screwing around in his house without seemingly telling anyone, ironically told him everything. They were suspicious of him - like L was - but they didn't have the evidence needed to incriminate him so they were looking for something more conclusive.

This he could work with.

Light attempted to hide the smirk that wanted to spread across his face. "You know what? If you're so interested in my dad's career, I have something for you to look at." Light said to Mello as he stood up.

"Uh…huh? What?" Mello muttered, confusingly glaring up at him.

Light gave him a smile that probably would pass kindly but was filled with the most chaotic energy. "Well…" He drew off playfully for a second. "I have a habit of hacking into the police database…just to keep an eye on what's going on with Dad, you understand. I think you'd like to have a look at it. Come on, it's easy to pull it up on my laptop. It's up in my room."

Light barely finished saying the words before he took up towards the hallway and the stairs leading up to the second floor. There was only one set of stairs leading down to the main floor so unless that little friend of Mello's skittered into someone else's room - risky if he didn't want to be seen - then he would either be caught in Light's room…or whoever was up there would try to jump out of the window, which would be interesting itself.

"Wai-What?!" Mello screeched, the foul expression on his face wiped off in an instant. "No! No, no! I don't need to see it! You can just tell

me about it, down here!" The kid stumbled over himself, getting up from the floor and following Light down the hall, still protesting.

Light didn't stutter in his steps and he didn't pause. The peaceful smile on his face was completely at odds with the situation. "That's alright, there's no need to be shy. You're not asking for too much, I promise. Let's go see." Light replied, languidly.

"N-I'm not being shy! I'm really not, I don't need to see it I-I'm not asking for *anything!* Except for us to go back to the living room!" Mello protested behind him, growing more desperate when he realized that Light wasn't stopping.

You're yelling quite loudly, there. Light noted with humor. *Trying to signal to the person upstairs that we're coming up, perhaps? But where are they going to go?*

He stepped out onto the second floor, smaller hurried footsteps scuttling up the stairs behind him. He almost felt bad for messing with the kid this hard. Almost. "Keep up! Interesting stuff!" Light called encouragingly behind him, ignoring the frantic cursing that his proclamation elicited.

The kid actually got up the nerve to grab his arm to try and forcefully stop him when Light put his hand on his door handle. Instead of getting angry at the boy, Light merely smiled down at him benignly and gently but firmly pried the kid's hand from his wrist. Mello was looking especially hopeless this evening.

"And here's my room." Light crowed as he pushed open the door. As expected, the other kid had heard them coming and wasn't just standing around, waiting to get caught. That was okay, he was still here, Light was sure. The window was still closed.

“Mind opening my computer for me?” Light called to Mello and, not bothering to check if he was doing it, Light bent down to check under his bed.

“What are you doing?!” Mello’s frightened voice caused Light to glance up at the boy when he didn’t find another boy hiding under his bed. Mello’s eyes were wide and his gaze shifted sporadically from Light to other parts of the room.

Maybe it’s because he’s a little kid now, but I can read him like an open book. Light mused. He was clearly trying to figure out where his friend had hidden himself in the room. Light could search the whole place, making one excuse after another, but why stop the fun there? Mello also looked more than a little relieved that Light hadn’t found him underneath the bed, but that was okay. Light would find him.

“Let’s take a look at that database!” Light got up from the ground, making a show of clapping his hands in excitement. Putting a hand on the younger boy’s shoulder, he herded the younger boy over to the laptop that was still closed. Mello went with him willingly enough, but worry was etched in every inch of his body.

Didn’t think this little plan of yours out enough, did you? Light chuckled, inwardly. Light quickly sat him down on the chair and stayed standing himself, leaning down to boot up the computer and do his hacking thing. He didn’t mind showing Mello this. It was a little bit incriminating, but overall, nothing major. It could be easily explained away, unlike the Death Note currently sitting in his school bag pushed under his bed.

Mello didn’t even bother pretending that he was paying attention to what Light was showing him once he’d hacked into the JPD database. Too worried about this friend of his, it would seem. Light took a special kind of pleasure in drawing it out as he took his sweet time

showing Mello *everything* and overriding any protests he made. They spent an hour and a half like that and it was glorious watching the little brat get more and more nervous and twitchy the longer they went. If only he could see the reaction of the other kid he was sure was somewhere in the room.

They'd be a lot easier to find once they start getting frazzled.

And apparently, stiff. Light was introduced to that idea when he heard a slight knock coming from his closet. After that sound, the air in the entire bedroom went still. Mello froze and so did Light before a big grin suddenly crossed his face.

"What was that?" He wondered aloud to himself performatively, straightening up to head towards the closet.

"Wait! I want to see more of the old cases!" Mello tried, almost knocking over the chair in his effort to stand up. "I-It's probably just something shifting!"

Definitely something shifting, Light thought. He didn't respond to the boy verbally and instead went to the closet and pulled open the door. He was nearly bowled over by the boy falling out of the closet. The kid looked almost as panicked as Mello as he held one of his legs bent up to his chest. Why he was doing that, Light wasn't sure.

"Matt!" Mello dropped the act, sounding angry and worried in equal measure. "What the heck?! Why did you move!"

"I was in there for *ages!* " Matt defended himself through gritted teeth and squinted eyes. "And I got a leg cramp!" Ah, so that's what that was about.

“Well, hello, Kids.” Light said, brightly. “Good to actually see the two of you. Now, why don’t we have a talk about what you’re really doing here.”

As he said this, Mello glanced nervously at the door like he was contemplating making a break for it rather than stick around to face the consequences of his failed plan. Light sighed. *This is why it’s so exhausting dealing with kids in situations like this,* Light thought. Situations like Kira catching two mini investigators snooping around in his room.

Light wasn’t going to play with him on this, though. They were going to sit here and talk.

Pointedly and without breaking his gaze away from the shifty Mello, he bent down a little and grabbed the so-called Matt’s arm. He didn’t pull Matt off the floor yet or squeeze him especially hard or anything like that. Regardless, the message was clear as Mello stopped glancing at the door and the two instead stared each other in the eyes.

I’m not going to stop you from leaving the room and if you take off running now, you’ll probably be too fast for me to catch you…but I have your friend. You can run, you just have to leave him behind to do it.

The intent came through clear to Mello it seemed and the young boy’s shoulders slumped after a few seconds of their little staring contest. He glared hatefully at Light before flicking a glance to Matt and staying where he was.

“Come sit on the bed, will you?” Light asked, not unkindly. Another glare. “Your friend can sit with you.” He wasn’t sure if that sounded like a good offer to the kid or a further threat but it didn’t matter right

then.

Mello shuffled uncomfortably before heading cautiously over to the bed and plopping down onto it. Happy with that, Light gently helped Matt get up from the ground and stumble over to the bed. Mello grabbed onto Matt's arm as soon as he was beside him, glaring at Light. Matt was still wincing in pain and the way he'd barely put any pressure on that one leg as Light pulled him up said the leg cramp was still there.

Light sighed again. These kids, seriously.

Light stepped forward, ignoring the sharp flinch and snarl that he got from Mello as he kneeled in front of Matt. "What do you think you're doing?! Get away from us!" Mello snapped, looking defensive as a wolf cub.

Light ignored him completely, grabbing onto Matt's cramping leg. The kid let out a whimper of pain as his leg was pulled. Mello was looking murderous himself but clearly thought better of pushing Light and was holding back…for now.

Quietly and methodically, Light gently pulled Matt's leg out until it was fully extended, ignoring the sounds of pain the boy was making and how he instinctively tried to pull his leg out of Light's grip. But with his leg hurting so bad, he didn't have the strength to do that effectively. After extending his leg, Light began massaging different parts of it, applying pressure to areas when he saw Matt wince.

Mello didn't relax even if his expression got more confused, but Matt began to relax as Light proceeded. Every time that Light got done massaging one area, some of the pain left the boy's expression and his body slumped a little more into his friend's body. *Poor kid* , Light thought. He continued methodically, experimentally bending Matt's

leg towards his body and away, searching for more signs of pain to work on until they were gone completely.

Only then did Light let go of the kid's leg, standing up from the crouch he'd been in and stepping back a few steps. "So kids, mind telling me what you're really doing in my house *and* in my room?"

Mello was still glaring at him like the little brat he was, but the other boy - Matt - was still recovering from the experience or so it looked like. Still, Light thought that kid looked a little too languid to be able to level the kind of glare that Mello currently was. Light let Mello's glare roll right off his back. It wasn't like the kid could do anything right now.

He wasn't really sure how far this situation was going to go. The kids wouldn't want to talk to him and it wasn't like he was actually going to kill them so they were at a bit of an impasse. Meanwhile, the kids were still being silent so Light waited them out as he stared at them with his arms crossed.

In the end, it wasn't Mello who spoke but Matt. "We were just looking around." He offered, looking much calmer than his friend did. Light wondered why that was.

"And what exactly were you looking around for?" Light calmly asked.

"We were--" Matt started but was cut off as Mello hissed, "Shut it, Matt!"

Matt whirled around on Mello and shot back, "If it wasn't for your plan, we wouldn't be in this situation! I'm not going to wait and see what happens next because of your *great* decision-making skills!" Then he turned back to Light. "We were looking for evidence that you're

Kira."

"Matt!" Mello screeched, looking aghast.

"That was awfully straightforward of you." Light commented, tone still casual. And it was. He really hadn't expected the kid to be so straightforward, even after he started talking.

"Well, *I* don't think you're Kira." Was Matt's response. Mello groaned.

"If you don't think I'm Kira, then what are you doing trying to find proof of it?" Light asked with a raised eyebrow.

"For him." Matt gestured to Mello. "I was hoping that not finding anything would help him move on from his theory."

Light hummed thoughtfully before casting his gaze back to Mello, who looked on-edge. "And? Are you satisfied now?"

Mello looked to snap at his prodding and leaned forward. "Like hell I am! Just because I didn't find evidence yet doesn't mean we're not going to! And it doesn't mean you're not Kira!" Matt rolled his eyes at the outburst.

Light stared at the seething child, feeling keenly that he was like a baby wolverine. All teeth and snarling and anger. "Right. And I don't suppose you're going to tell me where you live or where your parents are to be letting you run around and break into stranger's houses like this?" As expected, his question was only met with silence and averted gazes.

Well, that's it, then. He thought. But at least he'd gotten what he wanted out of this conversation. He'd gotten confirmation of why they were here and unless they were much better liars than they took them for, they hadn't found his Note or anything else incriminating.

Light sighed, tired of these two already. "Alright, get out now. The both of you. And don't let me catch you doing something like this again." Both boys looked up at him, startled.

"What? Is that *it?* " Mello asked incredulously.

"Is what it?" Light asked, because he could.

" *This!* " Mello gestured sporadically. "You're just *letting us go?* " Geez, he really did think Light was some kind of demon, didn't he? Whatever. Light wasn't going to play that game with him right now.

"That's it." Light agreed easily. "Because despite what you might think, I am not Kira. But I *am* a policeman's son, so don't make me have to take action to stop you kids from doing this a second time."

"Is that a threa--" It was easy to see what Mello had been about to say, but he was cut off by Matt grabbing his arm and hauling him up from the bed.

"We'll remember that. Thank you, Sir." Matt said, bowing to him slightly before scurrying past him and out the door, dragging Mello behind him.

He listened as his bedroom door slammed closed and two sets of feet thudded down the stairs. He decided to wait a little longer before leaving the room so the boys had time to flee from the house. Hopefully out of the front door like normal children. However, it was only another minute before his door creaked open again.

Are those kids really still here? Light thought briefly as he turned to look at the door. He would've thought that they would be tripping over themselves to get out, just happy to get out of this little adventure alive. He blinked in surprise when he saw it was Sayu poking her head hesitantly into his room. "Hey, Sayu." He said quietly and taking it as an invitation, she pushed the door open further and came in. "What's up?"

"Soooo…." Sayu drew out, glancing around the room. "What was all that about? And why did Mello and another boy I haven't seen before go running down the stairs and out the door?"

"That's…a bit of a story." Light said with some embarrassment. *And I'm not sure how much to sanitize.*

Sayu raised her eyebrows at him. "Well then, come to my room and tell me all about it." She turned on her heel and started walking right back out.

"Your room?" Light questioned her, making to follow her out.

"For a change of scenery." She called over her shoulder without stopping. "I don't know what went on in here but you could probably use a breather."

Touta wasn't entirely sure what he was doing here. When the chief had called him a few minutes ago to let him know that L was getting agitated and Near was suggesting that Light had been gone long enough, Touta had informed him that Light hadn't come back out of the house yet.

Not that he'd been watching the house all that closely, because that would be creepy. L might've been comfortable when doing that, but Touta could never be and he wouldn't disrespect Light by treating him like some criminal who might sneak off if he looked away. It didn't take Near long to take the phone from the chief and intrude on the conversation. He'd told Touta in no uncertain terms that he should go into the house and tell Light that they needed to return.

Touta tried to bargain for more time for Light. It had been a while since he'd seen his sister, after all and he'd given so much to the case, but Near wasn't having it and shot his suggestions down. So with a heavy heart, Touta went up the short steps to the front door and after an awkward knock, proceeded into the house. Twitching with nerves and feeling out of place just walking into someone else's house, he checked the kitchen and the living room.

He got more nervous when he realized that Light probably wasn't downstairs. He really didn't want to go upstairs…

Touta proceeded to the bottom of the stairs that led to the second floor and staying there, he called up. "Uh, Light? Could you come down, please? Light?" No response. And no sounds of movement could be heard from up there.

Touta glanced longingly at the front door but the thought of Near being hard on Light when they got back because Touta didn't tell him they were wanted back propelled him forward. He went up the stairs in a state of complete discomfort and it got even worse when he had

to check a few doors before finding Light's room. At least he found it pretty quickly but he'd nearly twisted his ankle turning on his heel when he'd opened the door to Chief Yagami and his wife's bedroom. He felt like such an intruder.

He only identified Light's room because it looked like a male college student's. He got a good look around as he wandered into the room and stood near the bed. A single bed, a desk with a computer, a bookshelf with textbooks on it…and no Light. *Where on Earth is he?* Touta worried with some panic. Maybe if he called out again from the hallway, Light would hear him sometime. When Touta turned to go back out into the hallway, something caught his leg and with a yelp, he tumbled to the floor.

"Ugh…" He groaned, rolling onto his back. *What…grabbed me?*

Whatever it was was still around his leg. Looking down at it, he saw that it was Light's backpack. He must've stepped in one of the loops that was poking out from under the bed, where the backpack was, and his tumble had pulled it out the rest of the way.

Touta carefully unhooked his foot and then stood up to replace the backpack. *Why does Light store his backpack under this bed? Probably so he doesn't trip over it like I did…* Touta thought, bashfully.

Touta would've replaced the backpack where he found it and not given it a second thought…except that it was hanging open and he saw a quick flash of something through the opening that caused him to pause, his heart hammering in his chest.

"Death"

He could've sworn he saw bright white letters spelling out "Death" in

English. No, that was wrong. That must be wrong. Touta shook his head. It probably said something else. He'd only seen it for a second. Or maybe it was a manga.

Ignoring the part of him that said he should just leave it, he looked through the opening again and no, it did say "death". A manga, probably a manga, Touta told himself as he tentatively reached into his bag to pull the thing out. He was going to feel so silly for freaking out at a morbidly named manga in a college kid's backpack…

And then he was holding it. A black notebook with the words Death Note on it. This…wasn't a manga.

Touta's heart was beating nearly into his throat but he couldn't calm it. So Light had a notebook that had Death on the front. It was probably a joke and inside would be perfectly normal. Notes on school assignments and classes, he was sure.

Touta felt like he was having his own heart attack when he saw the writing on the inside of the journal, starting with the words "the person whose name that's written in this Death Note will die". This… had to be a joke. It had to be. A notebook with a name couldn't kill someone. And Light wouldn't have something like that.

But in his mind's eye, he could see Lind L. Tailor dying of a heart attack on live TV with no one touching him. And all the other criminals that died of supposed heart attacks en masse. How did one explain any of that except for supernatural abilities? What had come to mind for Touta were stories of people who could move things with their minds, not the notebook he was currently holding.

With trembling fingers, Touta began flipping through the notebook. He wanted the truth but what if the truth..?

There were names of dead men in the book. People who had died before and during the Kira Case, all written in Light's handwriting. This was…

Touta flipped back to the first couple pages and went over them again. This time, he caught sight of a name on one of the earlier pages that meant everything. *Lind L. Tailor* . Light had killed him. He really was Kira. All of the feelings slammed into him then. Pain, panic, fear, hurt, sadness.

I need… Touta tried to think past the emotional haze clouding his mind. *I need…to get this to L.*

He needed to get this evidence to L! Right. He…he needed to…but Light would notice if it was gone.

Just a piece, then. The most important piece. On the verge of a panic attack, Touta shakily ripped the page out of the note. Clutching it in his hand, he made to put the notebook back but as he did, he caught sight of a shoe in the doorway out of his periphery. Touta gasped and jerked around, dropping the notebook in shock.

There was Light. He was leaning against the doorway, wearing a completely impassive expression.

"L-Light…" Touta didn't know what to say. Light had seen that. He'd seen everything and Touta was no good at lying. Was Light…was Kira going to kill him? Kira didn't kill cops, but…

"Hey, Touta." Light said, offering nothing.

Touta could barely see something that faded in and out over his body or maybe through it. It only happened every couple of seconds and it was always just out of focus, but he could pick out certain features of…something superimposed over his view of Light. It looked like wings protruding from Light's back, claws spreading from his hand… Light's skin faded to a gray color and then back again.

"What…are you?" Touta found himself rasping out, his throat dry.

Light let out a huff of laughter, not looking angry in the slightest.

"Congrats, Touta." Light said, gently. "You figured it out, you got the proof you needed." He smiled widely and it was so far from what Touta had expected, that it made the whole scene feel disjointed and misaligned.

He had felt so sure that Light would be angry at him for rooting through his stuff. For prying into his private affairs. For finding out.

Instead, Light congratulated him on his deduction. Touta only stood there, the proof of Light's deception clutched in his hand. He stared at Light with wide eyes, all of the things he thought he knew about the college student going through his head.

"What's wrong, Touta? Aren't you happy? You solved the case!" Light questioned, sweeping his arms out widely. His smile never fell.

"You lied to us." Touta choked out, at last.

Light cocked his head to the side. “Did you expect me to admit I was Kira?” There was a long pause where Touta couldn’t or didn’t answer.

Light sighed and finally the smile left his face. It slid into a small frown, but not a scowl. “I hurt you.” It was a statement, not a question. “I led you to believe I was falsely accused of a serious crime that I didn’t commit. I made you believe I was innocent, but it wasn’t true. You have every right to be upset with me, especially since I’d do it again.”

Touta had started shaking at some point, while Light was acknowledging his betrayal, but it was with that last admission that Touta once again froze. “You’d what…?” He asked, shock and confusion mingling together. Almost absently, he asked, “Aren’t you supposed to be saying you’re sorry and that you will never do it again..?”

Because isn’t that what people always said when they were caught in the act? Whether it was cheating or stealing, didn’t they usually make promises like that to the person who caught them?

“I probably should be.” Light gave an amused smile. He paused before offering, “I’m sorry that I hurt you. I truly am, it’s my fault, but I’m not sorry that I did it and if I said I was or that I had any intention of stopping, it would just be more filthy lies.”

Light huffed out a laugh. “I could give all sorts of reasons why I did what I did, but I won’t make excuses when you’re hurt because of something I did. You can ask for my reasons if you want to know. Regardless of my reasons, I did what I did and you have every right to be angry with me.”

Touta felt like crying. Why was Light like this? Instead of reacting with anger or covering for himself out of desperation, he laid himself

bare. Instead of putting the responsibility on Touta, he took it upon himself. It almost hurt more that LIght wouldn't make excuses. Even after being exposed, Light was still responsible and caring. The mask was ripped off and he hadn't changed.

Touta desperately wanted to hear his reasons, his justifications. He wanted to be convinced that what Light was doing was the right thing. His training told him that he shouldn't listen to anything Light had to say and yet…and yet. Something in him became more convinced of how good a person LIght was when he *didn't* hurry to defend himself. Instead of excusing his actions, he validated Touta's feelings of betrayal and hurt. Few people had ever done that for him.

I've thought to myself before that maybe Kira isn't a bad person. And Light is one of the kindest, most empathetic people I've ever met. If Light and Kira really are one and the same… "Please." Touta pleaded, his voice shaking. "Tell me why you do it."

Light's expression changed briefly, looking soft and sad. "Because I care." Light walked closer to him and Touta flinched back but Light only bent down to pick up the black notebook he'd dropped. "I can't let you take this." Light said, as if he were talking about the weather. "But you can keep that." He said, gesturing to the page that Touta still had clutched in his fist.

"But why…" *Why would you let me leave with the proof I need?* Touta couldn't force himself to say the words out loud.

"Do whatever you think is right with it." Light said with a soft smile.

Light didn't say anything else, just turned around and walked out of the room. After a moment, Touta heard him going down the stairs. It took minutes for him to get the courage to leave the house and when he did, he found Light waiting for him in the car like nothing had

happened.

The world felt surreal to Touta as he dropped Light off at the hotel and drove to the police station. He couldn't say exactly why he was there and why he didn't go into the hotel to talk with L, except that he didn't want to. He was working almost on autopilot. All he could hear was Light's last words replaying over and over again in his head.

Do whatever you think is right with it.

As Touta came into the station, he drifted past the quiet desk and behind it. He thought quietly about what he knew he was going to do before silently unclenching his fist from around the piece of paper he'd ripped from Light's notebook.

And unflinchingly fed it into the shredder behind the desk.

He left without looking back.

Consequences

Chapter Summary

> Light's POV of the previous chapter's confrontation and there's a date and talk of children.

Chapter Notes

> I did it! I got the chapter up over (my) weekend! I am exhausted and I move into my new place after work tomorrow and I'm a badass. Sorry, I'm just riding high on getting this done. 9,715 words, if anyone was curious.
>
> That is all. Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So what am I supposed to tell her, exactly? Light asked himself as he sat down next to his sister on her bed. Sayu stared back at him, expectantly. *Well, thinking on the fly has always been my strong suit, anyway.*

"So you scared Mello off, huh?" Sayu asked.

As good an opening as any, Light decided. "Not intentionally. He got scared off when I caught his friend in my room."

Sayu scooted closer to him. "Yeah, what was up with that?" She asked. "Where did he come from and why was he in your room?"

"Mello and I were in the living room talking about dad's job, but I had a bad feeling about the kid and then I realized that he kept glancing at the stairs while we were talking. That made me realize that there might've been something going on and I decided to check my room and then yours. He followed me up. I really hadn't been expecting another kid to be in my room." Light spun the story. "When I caught

the other kid in my room, they both tore out of there, which is what you saw. They're probably long gone by now."

Sayu looked startled and confused. "But what do you think he was doing there?"

Light shrugged. "Probably trying to steal something to make a quick buck. It was probably Mello's job to keep you busy down there while his friend grabbed something valuable upstairs but then I came home."

Sayu looked at him speculatively. "Then shouldn't we call Dad or report it to the police or something?"

Light huffed out a laugh. "What would be the point? They were just stupid kids, Sayu. Trying to make a little money to buy something their parents wouldn't buy them. No one got hurt and they didn't actually steal anything. I guarantee they were scared out of their minds after they were caught. They'll probably stay away from here on." Sayu didn't look convinced. Whether she was unconvinced about how safe they were or by Light's whole story, he couldn't say.

"Hey, Light!" Ryuk made a racket flying into Sayu's room. Actually, when had he left?

"What is it?" Light asked in such a way that it made it seem like he was speaking directly to Sayu. Ryuk knew by now how to interpret that.

"There's someone else who went into your room after you left! I was watching them!" Ryuk crowed right before Sayu said, "I'm just not sure why this all happened in the first place." That didn't look like it was all but Light wasn't going to push her on that right then. As for

Ryuk's information…

Let me guess, it's L, right? Must've followed us here. Then did he really know about what those boys were up to, after all? "Sometimes these things just happen. Maybe they knew who dad was and thought it'd be exciting to steal from the home of the Chief of Police. Teenage boys do some really dumb things but in this case, they were pretty harmless."

Ryuk continued. "It's that Matsuda guy."

Light blinked and tried to keep the surprised look off his face. *Wasn't he supposed to be waiting in the car? Why the heck is he in my room now? Is this just "party in Light's room" day?*

"I thought I heard something and decided to check it out." Ryuk informed him. "He was probably looking for you. I'm not surprised you didn't hear him, he wasn't very loud. Nothing like your mom when she yells." He cackled.

I don't care about that, what's he doing now? Light thought, shooting a brief look at his friend. Ryuk must've gotten something from that look because he shot up again, flapping his wings. "Be right back!" And he shot out of the room. Light sighed and rubbed his forehead a little. It was becoming quite the day.

"Are you okay?" Sayu asked in concern, peering up at him with wide eyes.

"I'm fine." Light told her with a smile. The display of tiredness ended up working out for him because after that, his sister didn't ask anymore about what happened with Mello and Matt. Instead, she turned the conversation to other things, like how things were going on

the Kira Case.

Honestly, Light thought. *Why did I never fully appreciate how thoughtful my sister was in the first life?* The younger him was a fool. Ryuk launched through the wall seconds later.

“He has your notebook in his hands!” Ryuk sounded panicked and Light’s heart skipped a beat at the words. “Do you want me to rip it out of his hands?”

Light considered it for a second before he forcefully calmed down but easily dismissed the idea because seriously…a haunted notebook that floats? Not exactly better for Touta to see that. Light winced at the thought.

Sayu, seeing that very wince, paused in her chatting about her day. “Are you sure you’re okay? Maybe you should go to the bathroom and get something for the pain?

Light shook his head slightly but made eye contact with Ryuk as he did it. “Are you sure?” They both asked him at the same time and Light really wanted to laugh at that.

“Yeah, it’s okay.” He answered the both of them.

“But…is it really okay that he looks inside it? If he does, he’ll see everything!” Ryuk still sounded upset.

I know how you feel, Light wanted to say to him. *But it’s really okay, let him do it. If he’s found it, he’s already suspicious and…*

And maybe Light wanted someone besides himself and Ryuk to know. Maybe he was just tired of lying to Touta and this was his chance to see if he could really trust him. And if Touta surprised him by turning him in to L? Well, Light wasn't afraid to face the death penalty.

He knew death was only a new beginning, anyway.

He spent another minute talking to Sayu and then he said, "Maybe I should go back and rest."

Clearly worried, Sayu jumped on it. "Yes! You definitely look like you could use a break! You should lie down and take a nap or something, I'm sure you've been working hard enough."

Light patted her head. "I promise I'll do just that as soon as I get back to the investigation office. I'll take a break, I promise."

:I wish you could take it here." She pouted. Light felt a pang at that.

"Sorry. I probably need to get back soon or they'll take my head off for it." He gave a laugh to show that he was joking. "Don't worry. I promise this won't be the situation forever."

"Then…" Sayu started. "If you can't stay for long, can I at least text you once in a while? You don't need to tell me anything about the investigation if you aren't allowed to. I just want to know how you're doing."

Light's smile softened. "Now why didn't I think about that? That's a

great idea, Sayu. Then we'll be able to talk more and you can tell me about school."

Sayu's expression immediately brightened up. "Thanks, Light!" She launched herself at him for a hug, which Light returned readily.

The smile on his face - genuine as it was - slowly dropped when he closed her door quietly and stood in the hallway. He made sure the door was firmly closed before heading down the hallway. *Don't want to risk Sayu overhearing this, after all. Now to deal with the Touta Situation.* Taking a quiet breath, Light walked to his room, taking care to be as quiet as he was when he closed the door.

He wanted to see what Touta was up to for himself, so he didn't want the officer to hear his approach. That was made easier by the fact that his bedroom door was hanging open. Touta was still in there, reading his Death Note. Behind him, Light saw his backpack with his Note had gotten pulled out from its hiding spot under the bed.

It was unlike Touta to snoop under people's beds, so that probably meant that Matt had been rooting around under his bed before Light had caught up to their game. He'd probably moved Light's bag to check around it but hadn't actually looked in it. He'd nearly dodged that bullet only to get hit by another, but at least this one he could contain.

Light leaned against the doorway with deliberate casualness and watched as his friend flipped through the notebook with a horrified expression and then watched as he ripped a page out. Light didn't flinch as Touta whirled around to leave only to stumble as he caught sight of him there.

"L-Light…" Touta stuttered out his name, dropping the notebook to the ground in clear surprise. Light waited a moment but when the

other man didn't offer any excuses for what he was doing there. Not that excuses would do much in this kind of situation. It was just that Touta would normally be stumbling over himself to give an apology or an excuse.

"Hey, Touta." Light greeted, making sure everything about his body language and mien were relaxed. It hurt to see the devastated expression on Touta's face when he looked at him, but it was better than the expression engraved into his mind from when Touta shot him.

Of all the things that Light didn't think he would say, what came out of Touta's mouth was, "What…are you?"

It was so surprising that Light let out a huff of laughter. He'd have to talk to the other man about why he was asking that at some point, but for the moment-- "Congrats, Touta. You figured it out, you got the proof you needed."

The congratulation was genuine but Light also knew how creepy saying something like that was in this circumstance. What he got in return was a look of frightened devastation from Touta and the look hurt. Light covered his own discomfort with another cheery proclamation just on the edge of mocking. "What's wrong, Touta? Aren't you happy? You solved the case!"

The words had barely gotten out of Light's mouth before Touta spoke. "You lied to us." The older man's voice sounded raw. Light covered his pained reaction to that, as well.

"Did you expect me to admit I was Kira?" Did he really? Because no one in their right mind would admit to any such thing to a police officer, but depending on what Touta thought of Light right now, he might expect him to not be in his right mind.

He waited for Touta to answer, but the minutes ticked by with neither moving and Touta still seemed to have nothing to say to that. Light sighed. Nothing was going to move forward like this and his heart was hurting a bit. Maybe he should just be more real with Touta, like he'd been earlier.

"I hurt you. I led you to believe I was falsely accused of a serious crime that I didn't commit. I made you believe I was innocent, but it wasn't true. You have every right to be upset with me, especially since I'd do it again." And he would. How could he, in good conscience, apologize for doing something he wasn't sorry he did? How could he say he would stop when he knew that he wouldn't? Even death hadn't stopped his antics. It was a Shinigami's only reason to exist, after all, their job. Lying to Touta's face was hard enough as it was, nevermind that the man knew now.

Light was closely watching Touta, so he was able to see when the man's expression shifted to shock, his mouth hanging open. "You'd what…? Aren't you supposed to be saying you're sorry and that you will never do it again..?" He whimpered.

That made Light smile. This whole situation was bizarre. "I probably should be." He stopped to think for a second. There *was* something he was sorry about. "I'm sorry that I hurt you. I truly am, it's my fault, but I'm not sorry that I did it and if I said I was or that I had any intention of stopping, it would just be more filthy lies." Because that was the one thing that he was truly sorry about. He would do everything he'd done in this life exactly the same way if given the chance, but he was still sorry to hurt Touta. He did it and he took responsibility for that, but he'd never wanted that.

Even if I'm not sorry, I'm still mature enough to take responsibility for what I did. I bear responsibility for it alone, Light let out a small, deprecating laugh at his own thoughts. "I could give all sorts of reasons why I did what I did, but I won't make excuses when you're hurt because of something I did. You can ask for my reasons if you want to know.

Regardless of my reasons, I did what I did and you have every right to be angry with me."

And Touta really, really did. He had every right to be hurt and angry and betrayed. To turn around and turn Light in. Of course Light believed his actions were justified, but he could see past his own ego now. Just because he believed what he was doing was justified didn't mean he would demand anyone else did. Even if he'd do it again, he *did* betray Touta before the case had even started. That was a truth, whatever his reasons.

And because of that, he wasn't going to rush to justify himself. He wasn't going to force explanations onto Touta that he didn't ask for to try and bend the man to his will. If Touta asked for his explanations, then he could give them.

You got more flies with honey than with vinegar, anyway. The best chance he had at convincing Touta to keep his secret would be to give the man what he'd always wanted; a Kira that wasn't malicious. He'd voiced for years that Kira might not be evil and Light could be "not evil" now. A part of him trusted Touta to do what he had always done: see the best in him.

As if reading his thoughts, Touta - shaking - asked, "Please. Tell me why you do it." The man didn't seem to care that he was begging and it *hurt* .

Light sucked in a quiet breath. This wasn't the place to have an hour-long talk about ethics and murder and the nature of humanity, but he could give Touta something he could latch onto, to *understand* before they faced the world again and his loyalty to Light would be tested. Something to understand where Light was coming from… "Because I care."

Touta fell into silence again, whether it was because of fear or because he was thinking about what Light had said and how he was acting. Baffling, he was sure that was how his behavior looked to Touta.

Done waiting for Touta to break the silence, Light pushed off from the doorway and walked towards the man, gratified when he didn't retreat to the other side of the room when Light moved. "I can't let you take this." Light took his Note from the floor. He'd give it to Ryuk before they got back to the hotel and have him hide it somewhere for him. No matter how affectionate he felt towards Touta, he couldn't hand his Note over to someone else so easily.

It was a part of him in a way. It was *his.* Even if he was hoping his kind way of handling Touta knowing the truth would make Touta pause in handing over what he knew to L or Near long enough that Light could win him over enough for him to give up on that route entirely. That was why he said, "But you can keep that." Making sure Touta knew he was talking about the page the other man hadn't let go of for even a second.

"But why…" Touta drew off, looking scared and in shock.

"Do whatever you think is right with it." Light told Touta, kindly. And he meant it. He'd let Touta make his own decision on this without telling him what he wanted him to do. He knew that line was verging on emotional blackmail to make Touta feel guilty, but conversely it was also what Light wanted him to do.

Although he was hoping Touta's idea of what was right ended up aligning as much with Light's as it sometimes appeared it did. Light was treading a line of being genuinely fond of the man and willing to accept his demise if it came at Touta's hands, while also gearing what he said towards making the man second-guess turning him in. It was a lot easier to turn in someone who was acting aggressive and threatening and *villainous* .

Light's skill in his past life and this one had always been getting people to like him. His continued kindness was like honey and his basically allowing Touta to do what he wanted with the page he'd ripped out was a kind of reverse psychology or at least Light hoped that was how it played out.

That seemed a good message to leave Touta thinking about, so Light decided to leave the room. He didn't hear Touta immediately follow him but Light didn't slow his pace as he started descending the stairs. Ryuk followed him closely. Rare for his friend, the other Shinigami had stayed respectfully silent during their confrontation.

"Couldn't you have just threatened him into silence?" Ryuk asked him.

"Of course, I could have." Light said quietly. "But that wasn't the right move and wasn't something I really wanted to do, anyway. Touta's a kind soul, he's fragile. This was the right move, no matter what happens."

Ryuk's muttering didn't sound like he agreed but he didn't argue with Light on it, probably knowing better. At the front door, Ryuk spoke again. "Well, worst case scenario, we'll just go back to the Shinigami Realm together." He said, being strangely positive knowing how he usually was.

Light got the unspoken implication on what the "worst case" was and smiled wordlessly at Ryuk. He didn't want to leave L so early, but he'd always have his friend and that was why he could keep moving forward without being overcome with worry about what might happen if his calculations were off in the end.

When the Touta came to his senses, Light would be waiting for him in

the car.

~ ❶ ~

When Light got back to the hotel, Light was surprised when Touta didn't get out with him but instead drove off elsewhere. Light spent some time gazing off in the direction that he drove before going inside.

I wonder what he's going to do with that page, Light thought to himself. He thought about the Touta that had gone nuclear and killed him in a rage…but he also thought about the Touta that he knew much better. The more prevalent kind, understanding, and supportive Touta. The Touta that had ceaselessly played devil's advocate for Kira in the past.

He wanted to trust Touta to have his back, even if he was upset with him right then. He really did. Even more than that, he didn't ever want to hurt Touta to that point ever again.

Finally letting out a breath, Light forcibly relaxed his body and went into the hotel. He didn't call to let anyone know he was back. He didn't need to; he knew that they had cameras in the elevator. As expected, Watari was waiting outside the elevator to escort him when the doors opened on the floor L had rented out.

"Would it be alright if I got to spend some time with my dad before buddying up with L again?" Light asked him before Watari started towards L's room. Watari stopped and looked at him for a moment with that unreadable expression of his before saying, "Of course. As long as you are not left on your own without N's approval, I am sure we can spare you some moments with him."

And with that, Watari led him back to the investigation room where

his dad, Near, and most of the other investigators were.

“Light.” His dad smiled tiredly when he saw him but there was a brightness to his eyes.

“Hi, Dad.” Light smiled, venturing into the room and taking a seat near the man.

“Welcome, Light. I was going to call for you if you didn't come see me.” Near greeted him.

“Oh? What about?” Light tilted his head.

“Just wanted to make sure nothing happened during your visit. You were later than expected and the fact that Mr. Matsuda hasn't come inside with you is questionable.” Near explained.

“Fair point.” Light said with a smile that looked less strained than he actually felt. “I don't know anything that happened with Touya. I mostly talked with my sister and then he came upstairs to get me and we headed back. He probably had something to do before coming back.” Light tried to say all of this with his patented carefree tone.

Near glanced up to stare at him deeply for a while before responding. “I see.”

Well, that definitely sounded loaded but Light was not the guy to bring that up in front of the whole group and make a headache for himself.

Eventually Touta came back, entering the common area completely silently and with his head down. He didn't say anything as he took a seat, which was unusual enough to garner a few people's attention even if Light was the only one who knew what was wrong.

He was usually so upbeat that everyone took notice of his downcast demeanor, but Touta wouldn't answer their questions about if something had happened. A few of them - finding Touta unresponsive - turned to Light to ask if anything happened at his house, but Light waved them off saying it was nothing major and that he'd talk to L about it later. And if the rest of the group were frustrated at Light and Touta's twin silent acts, they knew better than to push much farther.

Meanwhile, Touta wouldn't look at him, but that was to be expected. The knowledge he'd gained was a lot, Light knew, the man had just found out that the son of the man he so deeply respected was a serial killer. The very killer that he was supposed to help catch.

I wonder if he's considering giving L the paper, Light thought as he gazed at him. Light wasn't entirely sure what was going to happen. Touta looked devastated but he wasn't *saying anything* .

It didn't take Near long to get involved. "Is there something troubling you, Mr. Matsuda?" The pale boy asked from his position on the floor. At some point, he had clearly had Watari buy him toys to play around with and currently had them spread out around him. He was also still wearing Light's coat.

Similarly to L, Near didn't look away from what he was doing as he spoke to Touta. Light recalled from his previous life that that trait used to annoy him. It made him feel like L wasn't really paying attention to him when he wasn't looking at him when he was talking. It was just common courtesy. But they were just meaningless social norms that didn't have any real substance and Light found it cute now.

He didn't know if Near did it naturally or if he was mimicking L, but it was adorable either way. Light also remembered watching Near play with his toys as Chronos. He'd watched Near so much during that time and he knew Near used them to help him visualize his thoughts.

"Huh? Oh no, there's nothing." Touta looked like a deer in headlights at Near calling him out. Too bad he wasn't a more convincing actor.

"It's clear that's not the case." Near stated, factually.

"There's nothing. I--I just--" Touta looked like he was starting to shake a little and it was nearly enough to send Light to the other side of the room to soothe him, despite the fact that Touta probably wouldn't find his presence too comforting at the moment.

Thankfully, his dad stepped in before Light gave into the urge. "It's okay to be tired and stressed after working on a case for so long. Especially without much to show for our efforts." His father said in a soothing tone, attempting to be understanding even though Light thought it was obvious this was too extreme an emotional state to be explained by just that.

But when Soichiro went to place a supportive hand on Touta's shoulder, the younger man jerked violently away from the touch and stumbled out of his seat. "I--" Touta looked down at himself startled and then shot a wide-eyed look at his chief and the room. "I--Please excuse me!" He stuttered out and then made a beeline to the adjoining bathroom, closing and audibly locking the door behind him.

Most of the room looked at where the man had disappeared to in shock while Light just had a sad, knowing expression.

Touta splashed water on his face hurriedly and coughed violently into the sink, holding onto the side. His hands were shaking. When he'd visited the station and driven back to the hotel, he'd been feeling numb, almost like he was in a dream. Or a nightmare. But after he'd gotten back to the investigation room and had to look his team in the eyes, it had suddenly hit him.

What have I done? He stared at his own face in the mirror. His eyes were wide and horrified-looking and his whole body was shaking now.

He'd…he'd gotten rid of evidence that could conclusively catch Kira. he could've put an end to the whole case and all of the deaths…and he'd thrown. It. Away. It was useless now unless he went back immediately and taped all the shreds back together and even then…

What kind of officer are you? He asked himself, despairingly. He'd wanted to be a police officer all his life and he'd just let an admitted killer go free. *I'm a failure,* he realized. He'd always, *always* known that he didn't stack up to his peers in the force.

He was the guy that no one took seriously. He was never the smartest person in the room or the most capable or anything like that. That was okay, though, all he wanted to be was useful. He was a police officer, he was meant to protect people!

But didn't protecting people also mean Light, too?

Oh God, Light. Touta still had trouble believing it, even now. Even after he'd admitted to it. How could he not be in disbelief? Light was everything that he expected a killer not to be. Light was kind and

thoughtful and brilliant. He had more capability and potential in his little finger than Touta had in his whole body and yet he'd shown Touta more respect and care than most people he'd met.

How could the boy who'd encouraged him so kindly have turned around and killed so many people in cold blood? How could the boy who'd given so much for the case be the very person they were looking for? The Chief's son…the college student…the killer.

Touta tried to imagine the young man who had opened up to him about his troubled relationship with his father cackling as he killed dozens of people…and just couldn't. Maybe he was just a fool. No, he was sure that he was. The Chief himself had told Touta many times that the guilty party was often the last person suspected. Clever criminals, he'd said, had a way of blending into society.

But wrong as he knew it was, he just couldn't see Light as a criminal, even knowing what he knew. Sweet Light who defended L when he and Aizawa were going at it. Thoughtful Light who always showed his appreciation for what little Touta could do for him. Protective Light who got angry on Near's behalf seconds after meeting him because he didn't believe a child should be on the Kira Case.

If he could go back and stop himself…would he? To his complete shame, he couldn't tell himself that he would. If only he were half the man that his Chief was. If…if the Chief were in his shoes, would he have turned Light in? He couldn't bring himself to tell the Chief and find out. Couldn't bear to deliver that news and couldn't stand to rat Light out when - even to the very end - Light had been unfailingly kind to him.

The question plagued him as he pulled himself together enough to go back out and sat a little closer to the group. He noticed the concerned glances that Light would send him every once in a while, even if the younger man didn't say anything to him about it. He saw how Light smiled at his father in what looked to him to be completely genuine

affection. He saw the way the Chief glowed with pride every time Light made a deduction or clever remark.

He saw it all and it made him feel just the slightest bit better about what he had done.

~ ❶ ~

After a while, Light managed to excuse himself and went back to L's room. The man wasn't surprised to see him when Light got to the room. Watari had probably messaged him to let him know Light was coming.

"Welcome back, Light." L murmured before Light could say anything. "Now that you're here and have no plans to leave for the rest of the day, we can have our agreed-upon date."

"L…do you even know what people do on dates?" Light asked with a smile and a raised brow, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I don't appreciate the insinuation." L frowned. "I admit that I lack intimate experience with it, but I am well aware of the concept." Light holding his hands up in surrender in order to mock him also wasn't appreciated.

"So what are we doing, then?" Light asked, leaning back on his elbows.

L decided on the spot to not reiterate the idea of working on a case. His competitive nature had flared up at Light's teasing and he suddenly had the urge to prove to Light that he knew how to engineer

a date. “We are going to eat together. Feel free to choose anything you want from any of the nearby restaurants. We’ll have it delivered and Watari will bring it up to us.”

“Hmm… well, I suppose that does sound rather date-like.” Light replied and L was once again certain that he was being teased. “Let’s look up a nice place, then.” And before L knew what was going on, Light was cuddled up to his side with his laptop shared between them and searching through the internet for nearby restaurants.

“Mm! What about this one?” Light asked after a moment, turning the page to a restaurant that was basically all desserts.

“I didn’t realize you liked sweets so much.” L said by way of asking.

“I don’t.” Light smiled at him brightly, completely at odds with what he was saying.

L blinked. Light might just as well have said that he chose that establishment solely for L’s benefit. For a short moment, L couldn’t help but compare Light’s reaction to the other investigator’s reactions when they realized how much sugar L consumed on a daily basis. L supposed he could blame Light’s soft spot for him for why he seemed to want to enable L’s habit where others would cast judgment on it.

“I appreciate the thought, but you don’t have a big sweet tooth, correct?” Because L had noticed that Light had decently healthy eating habits. He ate a few sweets here-and-there, but primarily stayed away from sugary and junk foods. Sometimes Light only had a salad for lunch. It made L shiver.

“That’s okay, I can eat some.” And that wasn’t an answer.

“I must insist. This is a date for both of us, after all.” L insisted. He wasn’t sure what kind of reaction he’d been expecting - maybe an argument - but Light looking touched at his consideration was not it and it made him want to look away. The look and the accompanying sentiment made him vaguely uncomfortable.

“Alright.” Light gave him a big smile that no one could convince themselves wasn’t genuine. “Let’s get our dessert from this place and we’ll get dinner from somewhere else. You’re supposed to have deep pockets, right? Then I’ll stick you with the bill.”

The smile Light flashed at him after that clearly told him that Light was joking, but that brought up something that L wanted to pursue. “Would the reason you’re interested in me perhaps have something to do with my ‘deep pockets’?”

In an instant, Light’s expression turned dark. It took him by surprise because he was so unusual to Light being angry. The younger man was generally laid back, unlike his more straight-laced father.

When Light opened his mouth to reply, L readied himself for Light’s indignant comments about how L could accuse him of such a thing.

“Don’t talk about yourself like that.” Light said vehemently instead.

Confusion.

“But I didn’t say anything about myself.” L felt the need to point out.

“I don’t like the implication.” Light replied, which didn’t clarify the point at all for L.

“I still can’t ever recall saying--”

Light cut him off. “I don’t like that you implied that the only reason someone would like you is for your money.” Light snapped, looking very upset indeed as he spoke the words.

And L…L found himself floored again. Would Light ever stop surprising him? He was beginning to think not. He hadn’t intended to imply such a thing when he spoke, but hearing LIght say so, he supposed he could see it now. “I apologize, Light. That wasn’t what I had intended.” He said, believing that an apology would be the most expedient way to resolve the issue.

Light was only mildly soothed by the apology, however. “But do you really think that?” The brunette asked, insistently.

Here, L paused again. It was true that he hadn’t really meant the implication as he had said it, but the answer to this question wasn’t nearly so simple. L pondered it before noticing that the longer he took to answer, the more upset Light looked, but he didn’t interrupt him again.

L hastened to answer anyway. “That may be the case. I struggle to think of another reason.” He answered honestly even though he knew Light wouldn’t like this answer.

He hadn’t had time to think it through as much as he normally would, but LIght’s question rang of truth. If he thought about it more…yes, he really couldn’t think of another reason why he would be targeted, especially by someone like LIght who he was sure was set up for a

successful life.

It wasn't that he really suspected Light was after him for his finances, it was just that it was the only thing that made sense of why someone like Light would set his sights on him. That is, if it wasn't for the fact that he had already reconciled himself to Light simply not being a person that made *sense* .

Light had made it abundantly clear that he had some strange yet strong emotional attachment. Love. L hadn't the slightest idea where it came from, it was unaccountable. He still hadn't completely abandoned the idea that it was due to Light being impressed by the name he had made for himself, even if with Light's level of maturity one would think--

"You're different."

"Excuse me?" L asked as he found himself unceremoniously jerked out of his thoughts. His gaze found Light who was looking at him with determination.

"I said you're different." Light declared. Well, L knew that-- "There isn't another person in the world like you and there won't ever be. All of your different traits…the things you do and your ways of doing them…no one could mistake someone else for you, ever. Your little quirks are so unique and they make you so cute." There was that word again. Was he certain that Light wasn't just insane?

"You're so incredibly smart and capable. We can talk about anything for hours or talk about nothing at all. We share interests and even when we don't, I like seeing how you work. I think it's admirable how you believe in yourself and your capabilities even when other people don't. Even if you can be petty and childish about it sometimes, it's still admirable.

“You’re by far the most capable person I’ve ever met. When you want something, you can make it happen. I’d say you’re like a force of nature, but you’re way too calm and methodical to be compared to a tsunami or an earthquake. You’re interesting, stubborn, observant, intelligent, and strong. There are a *million* reasons why someone would like you for more than your credit card.”

L didn’t know what to say to Light now. He no longer considered Light potentially insane, but he wasn’t sure what he was. Was this really how Light saw him, then? Light’s conviction didn’t leave room for any doubt in L’s mind about its truthfulness, but he just couldn’t understand how Light had gotten such a good opinion of him.

Light had clearly had a crush on L even before they met and had weirdly enough liked him on sight as Hideki. Contrary to what L had assumed would be the case, spending more time together only strengthened Light’s feelings for him. And L…L felt the smallest bit humbled for the first time in his life.

No one besides Watari had ever really believed in L and no one - not even Watari - had believed that he had more to offer than his intellect. It felt…strange for someone to be so completely affectionate towards him, despite his efforts to show him the error of his judgment. L…for once, L wanted to reciprocate some of the sentiment someone had for him. He wanted to say something about Light, as well.

“I…” But L’s mind blanked, it was like his connection between his mouth and his brain had snapped. “I--Light is also--” But words failed him, L realized with mounting frustration. He couldn’t think of what to say or how to say it to make Light understand whatever it was that L was feeling. Even he wasn’t sure what to call it. But no more words came and L’s frustration mounted even higher. He was the greatest detective in the world, he should be able to talk to a teenager!

Light is kind. Light is understanding and thoughtful. He is intelligent and bright and endearing. Light had good qualities! Say it! Say *something* .

But for whatever reason, he couldn't. Light could say all those complimentary things to L, but L couldn't get himself to say them back.

And then Light did what he did best and stepped in to smooth things over with his own social skill. "It's okay, L. You don't need to say anything back." Light gave him a small smile. It wasn't a sad or judgemental smile, nothing to suggest L's lack of response made him unhappy. Just unquestioning acceptance, and that somehow made it worse. "No pressure."

L would believe it if someone told him that Light could read his mind because - almost as if sensing his continued frustration - Light's hand reached for L's but paused for a few seconds just an inch away from actually touching. Light waited for a few seconds, glancing at L as he did, before slowly closing the distance and placing his hand on top of L's.

It was similar to the other times that Light had held his hands, but it felt different all the same. It wasn't done without thinking or in a burst of emotion, and yet it still felt more significant. Usually L was highly uncomfortable with physical contact with others, like his skin was crawling.

This felt…warm. L felt warm.

~ ❻ ~

Mello panted heavily as he and Matt made it back to the hotel they'd

been staying at. They'd run all the way back.

We survived, Mello noted with wonder as he bent in half, coughing as he was finally allowed to catch his breath. Maybe he needed to get out and exercise more…

"I--" Matt wheezed. "--hate--" He coughed. "--you." Matt especially needed to get out more, Mello decided.

"At least…at least we're alive." Mello defended his decisions, trying to catch his breath. "We could've died."

"No," Matt paused to practically cough up a lung. "We couldn't have! Light is probably just a normal guy that looks vaguely like the guy in that grainy video of yours."

Mello rounded on his friend in frustration. "I'm sure that person was Kira and I'm sure that it was Light Yagami in that video!!"

" *Why?* " Matt burst back, equally frustrated. " *Why* are you so sure?"

"The person had light brown hair. That was clearly visible! Do you know how rare that hair color is in Japan? And do you know how close the address of the accident is to the Yagami house?? It's within walking distance! Are you telling me that there's someone else with the same rare hair color as the main former suspect in this case in the same region of Japan at the scene of a suspicious accident within walking distance of where he lives?!"

"Yeah, maybe!" Matt threw up in his hands in exasperation. "You know as well as I do that just because something isn't statistically

likely doesn't mean it doesn't *happen.* Even if he *is* the same guy in the video, it's no proof that the person in that video is actually Kira. All we have to link that person to Kira is that they were there at the time of the accident, that's it! I don't know if that guy is Light or if he's Kira or not! What I do know is that was a stupid plan from the beginning and I can't believe I went along with it!"

"The plan wasn't stupid!" Mello defended, heatedly. "How was I supposed to know the guy was going to come home while we were there? He was supposed to be at L's hotel!"

"I don't get what I was even supposed to be looking for! A bloody knife? An altar for ritual sacrifices? Maybe Kira's hit list where he confesses to killing all of his victims? What on Earth was Light going to have in his room that would constitute evidence even if he was Kira?"

Mello said nothing in response because he didn't have one. Instead, he clenched his fists and stared at the ground. He honestly didn't have a concrete idea about what he wanted to find there. No one even knew how Kira killed. The killer was a complete mystery that there were only theories on.

Even the theories that Mello had were second-hand. Things he'd read after he'd been given files compiled by L or Watari. Even the theory that Light was Kira wasn't wholly his; L had come up with it first. But the video camera footage he'd discovered? That *was* his. It wasn't someone else's discovery. It was Mello's. It was Mello's only discovery…so…

Matt looked at him pityingly, as if he could read Mello's mind. "Are you sure you don't just want Light to be Kira because you'd get L's attention for solving the case?" Matt asked.

Mello clenched his hand tightly into a fist at his side.

Matt continued. “But you have to know that if you get tunnel vision and it isn’t Light, it’ll only make you look worse--”

“Don’t act like you know anything about what it’s like!” Mello found himself snapping. “You don’t know what it’s like to always be just behind Near! You don’t know what it’s like to constantly be number two!”

“But I know what it’s like to be number three.” Matt pointed out, still calm.

“As if you’ve ever cared about the fight for succession!” Mello shot back, becoming increasingly upset. “All you do is play your games and you still manage to hold the number three spot! I try my hardest and I’m still just second place!!”

“Do you resent me, too?” Matt asked quietly, looking at him.

Mello froze up, staring at his best friend. He couldn’t answer and when a full minute had passed without him saying a word, Matt took that as his answer. He gave Mello a look he couldn’t read, turned around and left the room, closing the door behind him. Mello didn’t know if he was going to hang out there in the hallway for a while or if he was leaving and he couldn’t bring himself to stop Matt before he was already out the door.

“Argh!” Mello yelled, throwing himself down on the couch.

He *hated* how that argument had ended. He didn’t mean to fight with Matt, he really didn’t. And he didn’t mean to make him think he resented him or anything. It was just…when Matt had asked if he did,

he felt like he couldn't honestly say "no".

Maybe it was just how he was feeling right then, but Mell just felt so… little compared to Matt and Near. Which he *knew* was stupid because Near was younger than him and Matt was his best friend! It was just… they were both so talented and Mello…wasn't.

Mello knew - he *knew* - that Matt could've taken his palace as the second in line for succession if he applied himself. Why he was happy to play his games and follow Mello around in his efforts to beat Near rather than just doing that himself, Mello never got it, but he was grateful that his more talented friend didn't give a damn about being the next L. Otherwise, Mello would've easily been knocked down even further and been left behind like all of the other failures who were mostly forgotten in the grand scheme of things.

Sandwiched between him and Near, Mello knew that he was lacking. He was determined to make up for his lack of talent with hard work and tenacity, but…it preyed on him. Maybe that was why he couldn't tell Matt that he didn't resent him even when he knew he should.

Mello didn't know what to do now. Matt had made several good points - as he always did - even if Mello didn't want to admit it. It wasn't like Mello actually knew what he was doing and he could only admit that in the cold emptiness of the hotel room he had found himself in. Mello didn't really have any leads or evidence, so he really shouldn't be focusing so much on Light.

But the reasons that Mello knew he should let it go were the same reasons that he couldn't let go. He needed to prove himself to L. He. Needed. To. He had no other reason to live if he couldn't beat Near. He…he just had to.

Because Mello wasn't a quitter.

~ ❶ ~

“Hey, L.” Light called to him, seemingly without reason while they were eating their delivered food.

There was something about just how casual Light’s tone was and L didn’t know what to identify it as, but it made his hackles rise. “Yes, Light?”

“Are there two other kids involved in the investigation?” Light asked, still in that calm tone, but the words caused L to freeze momentarily.

“Why do you ask that, Light?” L managed to ask without too long of a pause.

Light was still faster. “Because I found two in my house today.” Light replied as if they were speaking of the weather.

Meanwhile, L’s mind stalled and then spun rapidly at this new information. “Could you repeat that?? Who did you find in your home?” L both needed additional information and was not about to admit to anything that he didn’t have to.

Light remained unphased. “I found a boy in the living room - talking to my sister - and another one hiding in my closet. They called each other Matt and Mello. Two of yours, I presume?”

L really didn’t want to admit that the two of them were investigators - it would give Light more knowledge to use against him - but Light

already knew of their existence and he appeared to possess this quiet confidence that they belonged to L so he was suddenly unsure if there was any point in lying.

…perhaps Light had worn on his sanity more than L had given him credit for. “They are. I apologize for their breaking into your home.”

“Only one of them broke in. My sister knew the other one was there.” Light clarified as if the distinction mattered. It did not.

“They still should have known better.” L stated.

“-than to get caught, you mean.” Light smirked at him. “That’s what you think they did wrong, right? Because they definitely learned that kind of behavior from you.”

L couldn’t tell if he should be amused or indignant at the allegation. “I don’t know what you're talking about. I do wonder where you got such a bad impression of my character.”

“Says Mr. Wire-Your-House-With-Secret-Cameras.” Light tilted his head back and forth as he spoke each word of L’s new moniker.

Was Light ever going to let that go? Lace a person’s home with surveillance devices without their knowledge *once* … “I obtained your father’s permission to do it.” L defended.

“And no one else’s.” Light shot back.

L knew that this conversation was going nowhere but he couldn’t

make himself give in yet. “Are you certain you aren’t angry with me for those cameras and listening devices I planted in your home?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. It’s just useful proof that you aren’t exactly a shining beacon of morality when your head starts getting a little too big.” Light answered him, giving a sly smile in response. “In fact, I bet you’d chain me to you twenty-four hours a day to try and prove that I was Kira if my father wouldn’t flay you alive for it.”

L wondered a little at what that smile meant - if this were perhaps another one of his flirtatious jabs - but he felt an internal wince as he imagined what reaction the Chief would have if he were to actually try such a thing. It would end up being the elder Yagami that would be the one that needed to be arrested by the end of it, L was sure.

“About the boys.” Light dragged L’s attention to the other matter. “How many children are you intending to bring into this? And do you know why they were in my house?” *Did you send them?* L heard the unvoiced question between the two that were.

L’s thumb found its way to his lip. “I would’ve thought that you would assume it was on my orders.”

“And I would’ve thought that you’d eventually start answering questions directly instead of dancing around them.” Light shot back, wearing a smile that suggested that he wasn’t actually annoyed by L. “I could assume it was you, but I’m not and I don’t really think it was.”

“I didn’t expect you to give me the benefit of the doubt, given that you’ve made it clear what you think of my morality.” L pointed out, to which Light only smiled. It admittedly felt almost pleasantly surprising for someone to believe a little better of L as of late. Perhaps that was why he said, “You’re correct. I wasn’t aware the boys had

entered your home until a moment ago." Light hummed and nodded, as if this were a confirmation of everything he'd already thought.

"Do you have an idea of what they were doing in your home?" L inquired.

"Oh, the Mello one believes I'm Kira." Light said easily and L nearly choked. "They didn't find anything though, and they tore out of my place like the hounds of hell were chasing after them. I don't know what they thought was going to happen…"

"Indeed," L muttered with only half his mind as he considered what the boys thought they were doing. "You wouldn't kill children."

The room dropped into silence. It took a few seconds for L to realize that Light hadn't responded and, blinking in confusion, L turned to ask him about it. And stopped. Because Light was looking at him so brightly with such a touched look on his face. What had he done to cause that? L played his last words through his mind, looking it over.

"I wouldn't kill children, huh?" Light absolutely beamed, looking like the cat that got the cream.

L stiffened but he wouldn't allow himself to be knocked off-center by the reaction. "Well, I don't believe you would." L stated simply and somewhat petulantly.

Light's tone was oh so soft as he replied just above a whisper. "Indeed. I wouldn't." He smiled.

L cleared his throat, shifting uncomfortably. "I'll be sure to have a

word with them.” He said.

“I don’t mind that they’re investigating me.” Light said. “I just want them to stay away from my sister, okay?”

L looked back at Light’s steady, determined gaze. “I understand.” And maybe Light trusted that he did because as soon as he said that, his expression cleared and he turned back to his food.

After taking another bite of his food, Light moved on. “It was nice being able to talk to my sister. I didn’t get to spend as much time with her as I wanted because of those kids’ shenanigans, but we did get to talk about some things together and it was pretty nice. We agreed to text more often so hopefully I won’t go that long without talking to her again.”

“Siblings as close as you two are should stick together.” L offered, even though he didn’t actually know how to talk about something as abstract and foreign to him as family.

Light still nodded along to his platitude like it was sound advice. “We’ll be sure to do that. I don’t want us to drift apart.”

“Why do Matt and Mello think you’re Kira?” L asked suddenly.

If Light was confused by the abrupt return to the previous conversation, he didn’t show it. Instead, he easily followed L back in his train of thought. “It’s not both of them, even if they were both there.” He corrected easily. “As far as I could tell from the situation, it was Mello who believed I was Kira, not Matt.”

“Did Mello say why he thought so?” L inquired. Here, Light paused.

L waited as the seconds ticked by, but Light didn’t appear as if he was going to give an answer. “Light?” L prompted. “Something the matter?”

“Hm? Oh no, just thinking.” Light said, slightly unfocused. L suspected that wasn’t entirely correct. “Anyways, I don’t think he mentioned why he thought that. Probably didn’t want to tell me.” He shrugged. “You should probably ask him about that.”

“I will.” L meant that to sound threatening, but Light remained unbothered, as usual. In truth, L hadn’t expected his second successor to be the one to point the finger at Light first, but perhaps he should have.

He’d told Watari numerous times before, but he suspected that neither on their own would be able to fully succeed him. Near has the technical knowledge and the higher IQ, but Mello had the instincts and tenacity of a detective. That was why he’d initially asked both boys to come onto the investigation.

The third successor had been an additional add-on by Roger that L had signed off on. He’d said something about the two being very attached to each other. He’d also said something about Matt being unmotivated and hoping that being on a real case would help him function at a higher level. L was less concerned with the third one, so he allowed the assistance.

Even though L thought that both boys needed to work together to equal him, it was important for them to stay where they worked best. Near’s emotional control and analytical ability made him ideal for taking a role at the head of the investigation. Mello was more caustic and wild, therefore it was best to keep him in the shadows where his

emotional decisions were easier to cover up and where he could focus on listening to his instincts and training.

L's phone suddenly rang, cutting through L's thoughts. "Oh. Excuse me." L muttered, rooting through his pocket and pulling out the phone to answer it. "Hello? Oh yes, Watari, what is it?" He listened to whatever was said on the other end of the line, humming at each thing he'd apparently heard. "Oh? Is that so…yes, yes we will be right over."

Without any further discussion, he hung up and turned to Light. "Naomi and the team that went with her to the meeting with Ms. Amane have just come back and they want to discuss something."

"Naomi's back?" Light asked, smiling before his expression slipped into something more contemplative. "Do you know what they want to talk about?"

"Something evidently happened during their latest meeting with Ms. Amane." Watari reported that Naomi seemed stressed by whatever occurred."

"Then we'd better go over there now." Light said, his protective streak showing.

L nodded along but he couldn't help sighing internally. It was the first time he could remember being annoyed by something coming up in the case.

Chapter End Notes

> Soooooooo. I'm definitely going to do something crazy in seven chapters. I mean, crazier than usual. The countdown begins.

Having Friends

Chapter Notes

I got nothing to say.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light and L promptly moved the several rooms over to where the investigation team was operating, the group waiting there for them. When he and L went into the main room, Naomi was waiting along with Ukita and Mogi who had both shadowed her to her meeting with Misa for her protection.

He found himself almost immediately impressed with Naomi's composure compared to the men next to her. If Light was judging only from Naomi's expression and body language, he'd think she was completely calm but the nervous clenching and unclenching of her hands suggested otherwise.

Must be that coveted FBI training, Light considered. "Hey, Naomi. How did the meeting go?"

Naomi looked over at the sound of his voice and her face lightened up from the stony expression it had settled into. "Oh, hi, Light. It's good to see you're doing well."

"On that note, I agree with Light." Near spoke up from his position on the floor. He was playing with his toys. In particular, a bandit toy and a cowboy toy were sitting in front of him. He didn't have any evidence and he didn't like the comparison, but Light couldn't help but think that the bandit toy could only be a stand-in for Kira. "Now that we're all here, Ms. Misora, I would appreciate you telling the rest of us what that commotion was about earlier. We can review the audio recordings later." Naomi was ready and launched into her account of what Misa had said during their meeting.

“So she’s dissatisfied with what we’ve given her so far.” Near summed up, calmly. “Not unexpected, given everything we know about her. She’s obsessed with Kira and people who are obsessed with something tend to want more of it over time. In addition, it is very difficult to pretend to be someone that you disagree with on a fundamental level. It’s likely that something you’d said or done came across as unusual for Kira.”

“So then what are we going to do about it?” Naomi asked, getting to the heart of the matter.

“I believe that the best thing we can do is make an educated guess on one of Kira’s next targets and hope that they die.” A ripple of unease went through the police officers in the room. None of them felt comfortable using someone’s death to further their own goals, let alone actively wishing for it.

“You can’t be serious.” Aizawa inserted, tone quieter than Light was used to, but the anger in his voice was also clear. Well, Aizawa had always tried not to raise his voice to or around Near, probably because of his own daughter of the same age. “It’s our job as investigators to stop more deaths, not use them for our own benefit.”

“With all due respect, Mr. Aizawa,” Near said. “Our job as investigators is to catch Kira. No more, no less. Saving lives is not our only duty.”

“Are you saying we should just let innocent people die?” Chief Yagami demanded sternly.

“Ordinarily? No. But under these circumstances, solving the case hinges on our ability to use whatever means available to us to solve it

and bring Kira to justice. If we can' t make some sacrifices, then we can't expect to win. Kira being unwilling to take ruthless action against us may be our only saving grace at this moment and do you really want that to continue? Also," Near paused here before casting a significant glance at the police chief. "The people that are dying aren't *really* innocent, are they?" A heavy silence fell over the room at his words.

Light cast a glance at Touta, who had been quiet throughout the conversation. He'd looked like a ghost for most of it, especially when Light's father had spoken, but now Light noticed that some of the color in his face had returned and he looked thoughtful. Light hoped that meant that he was thinking about Near's last comment.

Light himself was somewhat surprised that Near had said it, as well. He wasn't surprised that Near had thought it - not exactly anyway - but he *was* surprised that he said it aloud. Then again, he seemed to lack the filter that L had. Light knew intimately that nearly everything L said was a calculation.

The kid's age is showing, Light thought fondly.

"The morality of it aside, can we even do so accurately?" Naomi asked, pragmatically. "Kira doesn't kill consistently. They might not even kill in the time window we need and there's basically no chance that we'll pick up the correct victim."

While she was speaking, Light was having a minor panic. It would be easy, *so easy* , for him to open his little black book and pencil down a name that he'd been holding onto, but doing that would be like announcing through a bullhorn to everyone that Kira was *most definitely* in their group.

Which is why it would be a *very* bad idea to do.

It would be the proof of inside knowledge that Lind L. Tailor had been, except not in his favor this time. “Naomi shouldn’t go back to see Misa after this. That girl could be dangerous and we can’t take the risk.” He said insistently. Naomi looked at him in surprise but after a moment, the expression changed to a grateful one.

“That may indeed be the case.” Near said, though he sounded like he didn’t feel any particular way about it yet.

“Light’s right, we can hardly expect Misora to continue to engage with her after she realizes that we’re lying. His dad spoke up.

“We don’t want another incident caused by Ms. Amane.” Near stated. “What is your impression of her?”

Naomi dropped into silence for a minute, clearly thinking it over, and nobody interrupted her. “Misa Amane seems like an upbeat and bubbly young woman with a thriving social life,” Naomi started slowly. “But I’ve noticed several disturbing behaviors from her.”

“Such as?” His dad asked, leaning forward.

“She has strong obsessive tendencies. They are specifically geared towards Kira, but it may include other things.” Naomi informed them. Light already knew this, but he was happy to hear that someone else saw it too and was taking it seriously. Most people hadn’t taken her actions seriously in the past.

“Don’t most young girls get obsessed over things like actors? It’s macabre because of the subject, but is her obsession towards Kira really that different?” Aizawa asked.

Naomi's lips pulled into a deeper frown and Light thought she looked slightly annoyed as she replied. "Yes, it's very different." She said, "There are different kinds and levels of obsession. There's a huge difference between a teenager being obsessed over a singer and a fan who begins to stalk that singer's house and root through their garbage. Here, we've already seen some of that in the form of the media incident that she'd caused."

A ripple of unease went through those in the room that had experienced the incident. Threatening people's lives while pretending to be Kira just to get attention…Light had felt disgusted by it in his first life and he still was.

Whatever else Light might've been in the past, he'd at least not killed *talk show hosts* for attention.

"Most people do not cause incidents like that for *any* reason. Most people wouldn't consider it and even fewer would go past the realm of just thinking about it and actually carry it out. Recording yourself pretending to be some infamous killer and threatening people is not something a normal young adult would actually think is okay." Naomi said all this heatedly.

Then she stopped herself, took a shallow breath, and started again. "That's what I mean about her *seeming* like a bright and happy girl. She has an innocent appearance and a bubbly demeanor, so it can be…easy to miss at first glance, but she shows signs of the latter kind of obsession in more ways than just the spectacle she put on."

"She shows a concerning lack of awareness of how her actions impact others and the damage she can do. She's less likely to take it seriously when it's brought to her attention, as well. So she continually underestimates the negative impact her actions can have on others and she also has a habit of not thinking things through, from what I

can see. This leads to impulsivity and lack of remorse." Naomi finished her profile.

Near, who had been completely silent while Naomi was talking, took a little while longer to think over everything she'd said. "Here is what we're going to do. For the time being, Ms. Misora, we will be postponing your next meeting with Ms. Amane. If she messages with a problem about it, we'll take care of it. In the meanwhile, Ryuzaki and Light will be in charge of finding a suitable criminal that would be believable for Kira to target. Once the target is identified, we'll go through the process of staging their death for Ms. Amane. We'll put them in something like witness protection until the case is over."

"That's brilliant!" Aizawa breathed in excitement.

"Will that work?" His dad inquired.

"If the person we were dealing with was actually Kira, then I would say no. Kira has shown a keen intellect and an ability to know privileged information. From what we've also seen of Kira's actions, they are predominantly calm and collected. Such a plan would be easily seen through if Kira was who we were attempting to fool." Near stated calmly. "But they're not our opponent in this matter, that's Ms. Amane. She can make and follow through with plans, as we've seen, but she is much more emotional and impulsive. Most importantly, she lacks the ability to get information that isn't part of the public record, which means she'll be operating under limited knowledge. This plan should prove sufficient for her."

That seemed explanation enough for everyone and Light had no arguments as long as Naomi wasn't going to be in the line of fire.

"Having said that," Near continued. "I think I have gleaned all I could of both Light and Ryuzaki's innocence that I could from the

surveillance so in light of this latest problem caused by Ms. Amane, I think now would be a good time to allow both out from under it. You no longer need to be around each other as often, either. Though in the likely event that you still wish to spend a substantial amount of alone time together, you may do so."

Light was pretty sure that comment was proof that Near knew about their date and flirting. By the look his dad shot L, he'd caught onto the subtext, as well. Light was a little sad about his time alone with L ending so soon - though not completely if he had anything to say about it - it would at least be easier to move freely now.

He had the feeling he might need it.

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Touta made his excuses to leave the room before Light could get the chance to talk to him and though not unexpected, Light watched him flee with some sadness. Thankfully, his attention was quickly grabbed by something else. Naomi was sitting quietly by herself, looking troubled. Light wasn't sure what was troubling her, but he didn't want to leave her alone to be preyed on her thoughts and he could use the distraction, as well.

He quickly made his way over to Near and crouched down to whisper a question to the young boy. He received permission and directions and then made his way over to Naomi.

"Hey." He called gently to her but she still startled badly out of her thoughts.

"Oh, Light!" She cried, with her hand on her heart.

“Sorry. I was trying not to scare you. You seem distracted is all.” Light apologized.

“No, I’m sorry for being out of it.” Naomi said, sheepishly.

“Actually, if you want to talk about that, whatever it is, Near gave us permission to take a moment to work through it and he told me which room we could go to for some privacy.” Light said quietly, leaning into her space.

Naomi looked at him in surprise. “You don’t need to trouble yourself with that, Light. It’s nothing serious, I promise. I can deal with it on my own.”

“Don’t you remember what we talked about during your fiance’s kidnapping? Just because you can handle something all on your own, doesn’t mean you *should* . I’m always here to talk to.”

Naomi’s expression softened. She spent a minute considering what he said before gathering herself and nodding to him. “If it’s alright, then we can take a few minutes, I guess. There are some things I’m thinking about.”

Light beamed and led her from the room, ignoring the suspicious look L gave them as they left the room. The one Near had told him to go to was just a few doors down on the opposite side, but it would give them the privacy to talk. Well, as much privacy as you could get when the entire place was probably wired.

Light closed the door behind them. They both took a seat on the couch in the unused hotel room and awkward silence reigned for a few

uncomfortable seconds. Light took the initiative before it went on for too long.

"You can tell me, you know." Light said, gently.

Naomi sighed, closing her eyes. "What Near said earlier had me thinking. What he said about how difficult it is to act like someone else, especially when their beliefs are so different to yours." She sighed again. "I'm beginning to think that part of the reason that Ms. Amane became suspicious was because I had difficulty pretending to believe what we were talking about, as Kira would've."

Ah, so that was it. Naomi was wondering if she was partially to blame for this problem.

"Right. He did." Light nodded. "And he did for a reason. It's because it's a common problem that a lot of people experience. There's a reason that going undercover is such a big deal and why most people who do it get special training." Light said, placing a hand on her shoulder.

She opened her eyes and gave him a small smile. "Thanks, Light." She sounded tired and after they dropped into silence for a few seconds, Light tried again.

"I mean it. It's hard enough as it is so don't be so hard on yourself." Light said. "But if it's really bothering you, I could try and help you with it."

"What?" Naomi blinked, looking back at him with surprise.

“Understanding Kira’s side and pretending to be them.” Light explained, making sure to keep his expression as soft as possible as he made the offer. “If you think that your acting is a problem and Near says that understanding your subject is key to being able to impersonate them, then I feel a duty to help you understand Kira better.”

“Light…are you saying that you think you understand Kira well?” Naomi asked with a mildly disturbed look.

Light knew what he was about to say would make it even worse, but he knew this was the best time to make this information known to her. “I think I do.” Light made sure to appear even more hesitant than he felt as he spoke. “Actually, I identify as a Kira supporter.”

Naomi *jerked* . Her whale body froze and her mouth dropped open in shock. “Uh–I–Light, you–what?” She stuttered out, barely breathing.

Light took a fortifying breath. This conversation would either make or break his friendship with Naomi. “I don’t tell most people because I know how it sounds. I don’t want people to get the wrong idea about me. Plus, I need to be mindful of my dad’s career and how it might be impacted by the things I say or do. It would probably hurt the career he’s worked so hard for if it became known that his son was a Kira supporter, so if you could keep that information to yourself.” Light requested with his eyes downcast.

He wasn’t ready for the team to know yet. There were only two groups of people that Light felt comfortable telling he was a Kira supporter: those who had shown the most empathy or that he had the best relationships with and L. Because L had already been told when Light had lost connection between his brain and his mouth ages ago. Other than L, he only wanted to risk telling the people that he was most sure wouldn’t say anything until he was ready.

As for when he'd be ready to tell more people that little bit of "truth"...that would be when he had enough support that it didn't matter who knew what.

Light looked up and pleaded with her with his eyes when he asked her to keep it quiet for his father's sake. Letting her know this now was a calculated move on his part, one disguised as him being pressured by her circumstances to reluctantly admit to an uncomfortable secret rather than the opportunity he saw it as. Thankfully, he'd yet to meet someone with the dangerous ability to tell when he was manipulating, outside of L.

"I…" Naomi's muscles relaxed a little as he watched. "It's not like I want to go around telling everyone in the group, Light, but you have to understand that it's potentially a large conflict of interest. I think you should at least tell Near–"

"Hideki's known since our college exams." LIght inserted before she got too far along that train of thought and, as expected, she stopped short at this information.

"E-Excuse me, Ryuzaki knows that you're a Kira supporter and he's known since your exams?" Naomi asked, incredulously.

Light wasn't sure if her disbelief was because L hadn't said anything to them about it or because Light was strange for telling L that practically as soon as they met, even if he hadn't supposedly known he was a detective. It could very well be both.

"Yeah." Light nodded. "And I would expect him to have told Near when he came to replace him. Even if he didn't tell him, Hideki and I have discussed it a few times since he's come, so it's been recorded on camera. Either Near is watching the videos or Watari is and he's letting him know what he sees on them. So honestly, I would be

shocked if he didn't know and was just exercising some discretion." Light informed her.

All of which was true. Of course, if for some baffling reason Near didn't know, Light was in no hurry to tell him. But he really was very sure that both Watari and Near knew, so it wasn't worth thinking that hard about. Not when he had more important things to think hard about.

Light returned his attention to Naomi, who had fallen silent with a contemplative expression. Light leaned in closer to her. "Are you wondering why Hideki didn't say anything about it or why he let me on the team despite knowing that about me?"

"Uh, well…I suppose both." Naomi gave an awkward smile as she admitted it.

Light hummed. "Well, I'm sure you already have the answer to the first one. Hideki isn't exactly the most forthcoming with information. Probably has a lot to do with his job."

Naomi nodded, easily ceding his point.

"As for the second…" Light drew off for a second, tilting his head in thought. "He told me that it was because he thought my valuable insight into the 'other side' would be beneficial to the investigation, but I personally actually think that he just wanted to keep his chief suspect close." He made a small admission.

Naomi nodded along again, more hesitant this time. Light let the thoughtful silence they fell into stand, waiting for Naomi to choose to break it this time. Which she did, albeit a handful of minutes later. "Do you really think understanding Kira's side better will help?"

Light leaned back, gaze drifting towards the ceiling. “I don’t know. I suppose the only person who can answer that is you. Do *you* think it’ll help?” Light paused but when Naomi didn’t immediately answer, he continued. “For all we know, it might be too late, since she’s now asking you to produce a dead person, but if Near’s idea gets us out of this one, you might be able to use it to head off another incident.”

That seemed to help her make up her mind. “Then please tell me what you think you know, Light.” She said, looking at him with determination shining in her eyes.

“I don’t want you to think less of me because of my opinions…” Light pretended to be hesitant.

“I won’t! I promise I won’t, Light.” Naomi hastened to assure him, placing her hand on his arm as she promised this.

Light gave a shaky smile. “Okay. I’ll hold you to that. I guess…we should start with the main problems you have with Kira. So, what are your biggest grievances?”

Naomi looked at him in surprise, for a moment seeming like she didn’t know what to say. “What do you mean? It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“I can hazard a guess.” Light made sure to keep his tone mild instead of falling into sarcasm. “But what one person thinks is obvious can be very different from what someone else thinks.”

“That…you’re right. We should talk about this openly.” Naomi nodded, the gesture potentially to assure herself of its truth more than Light. “At first, my feelings on Kira were more along the line of

professional disinterest. I'd already retired by the time Kira cropped up, but my trained agent side couldn't help but be interested a little in what was being done to catch them.

"When…when Raye was taken - I *thought* by Kira - I'd been given a personal stake in catching Kira…I would've done anything to catch them. But they hadn't even been the one to take my fiance at all and so I'm not sure how to feel about it. Except that I still don't agree with what they're doing, even if I appreciate that they don't kill officers."

"Well, it's very normal not to agree with murder." Light said mildly, as if this were a completely mundane conversation. "Let's delve a little more into that, shall we?"

That, at least, got Naomi to crack a small smile. "You sound like a therapist."

"Then tell Dr. Light everything!" Light replied with a laugh on his lips.

Naomi laughed with him before replying thoughtfully. "It's just… horribly wrong to kill people like that, even if they are criminals."

"But it's alright when governments do it?" Light asked, gently. Naomi jerked, anyway.

"What do you mean, Light?"

"The death penalty." Light said directly but not unkindly.

In a blink, recognition entered her eyes. “Oh, right. A lot of people don’t believe in that, either…” Her voice drew off quietly at the end.

“So *you* have a problem with the death penalty?” Light asked curiously.

“I’m not really sure.” Naomi scrunched her face up as she thought. “I don’t really support it, but I also don’t really have a problem with it.”

A little *ding* went off in Light’s head as he registered the weak spot he’d just been presented with: the fact that she didn’t have a significant problem with the death penalty was a chink in her armor for Light to worm his way through. “Is that so?” Light hummed. “Is there a reason why you have more of a problem with it when Kira does it?”

“Because there’s no trial!” Naomi exclaimed. “There’s just one anonymous, probably mentally unstable individual, deciding who’s guilty or innocent based on limited information. At least the courts are fair!”

“Are they?” Light asked quietly.

“Come again?” Confusion washed away Naomi’s anger.

“I asked if the courts are really fair.” Light repeated. “It’s common for courts to use a jury system so the decision is spread between more people, but does that really make it fair?”

“Of course it does.” Naomi insisted, visibly troubled. “The more people involved, the more likely that they’ll make a fair decision.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Light murmured. “Human beings are notoriously irrational and easy to fool. They’re particularly prone to falling into a pack mentality, to simply agree with each other and take things at face value. Or there’s a larger chance that there’s someone in the jury who becomes stubborn about their answer for a dumb reason and won’t listen to any arguments otherwise. It’s not like the people on a jury are even chosen because they’re particularly knowledgeable about crime or the law.

The primary deciding factor on who gets put on a jury is whether or not they’re ‘impartial’, as if a person could ever truly be impartial. What precisely about a group is so much more reliable than an individual if that person is knowledgeable? Are we trying for quality or quantity, here?”

Naomi looked like she hardly knew how to respond and Light mentally reminded himself to reel it in a little, he didn’t want to scare her away. “That’s not fair, Light.” The legal system isn’t perfect–” Light fought not to snort. “–but it’s the best we can do.”

“That, right there. I don’t like that way of thinking.” Light said immediately.

“What? You don’t think it’s the best system we can find?” Naomi asked.

“No, not that.” Light shook his head. “I don’t like the way of thinking that one solution to society’s problem automatically has to make it the ‘correct’ or ‘best’ solution.”

“What do you mean?” Naomi inquired, giving him her full attention now.

Thinking carefully on the best way to phrase his thoughts, Light started speaking slowly. “A solution is just that; a solution. It doesn’t need to be - and most likely, is not - the best or only worthwhile solution to the same problem.”

“But don’t you think Kira’s method is the best one since you support them?” Naomi sounded confused.

“Well…yes, to a degree.” Light said thoughtfully. “That is to say, I think it is the best solution, given what I, myself, value and what I believe is most important in the issue. That is all completely subjective and, to an extent, depends on the issue itself.”

Seeing the look on Naomi’s face and not knowing whether it was from continued confusion or sheer disbelief at what he was saying, he kept talking. “I don’t think Kira’s solution is objectively 100% the best solution. I think that it’s the best based on what I personally think is the most important aspect of the issue. In my mind, Kira’s solution best benefits the things I most care about while sacrificing the things I care the least about.”

By the end of his explanation, Naomi’s expression had at least cleared up a little, which hopefully meant good progress. She didn’t look like she agreed, but she was at least thinking about what he’d said. That was something. “Can I ask what those things are?” Naomi asked him, looking genuinely interested and Light was happy to see it.

“What I care most about is the prevention of violent crime.” Light admitted to easily. After all, admitting to what he cared about was far easier than admitting to what he didn’t. There was a better chance of a positive response with one than the other.

“The police do that.” Naomi stated.

“No, they *don’t* .” Light asserted, unusually strongly and it took Naomi aback. “They *punish* violent crime, they don’t *prevent* it.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?” Naomi inquired, gently.

“Hardly.” Light said “The fear of punishment can prevent crime, but only as long as the fear is strong enough. If someone remains confident in their ability to escape punishment or the punishment isn’t severe enough to act as a deterrent, then its effect on the crime rate is minimal and there’s a big difference between punishing crimes after they’re already committed and preventing them entirely.”

“But sometimes punishing them is all we can ethically do.” Naomi insisted. “The police respond to plenty of cases where people have cause for concern that a crime may be committed. In situations where they can act, they do, but it’s unethical to act decisively without proof that someone has done something wrong and it’s also wrong to terrify people into submission with the fear of death to prevent potential crime.”

“Tell that to the people that suffer from the crime.” Light said, heatedly. “To the people who attempt suicide after sexual assault, to those who have to live with the murder of a loved one, to the people who have to be in therapy for years after being in abusive relationships. I’d like to see you stand in front of one of them and talk about morality.”

“I–” Naomi looked troubled, like she was imagining having to do that and didn’t like the image. “I know these kinds of things are hard…” She said sadly, staring at some point on the floor. “It’s not easy, I know. But everyone has the right to a fair trial.”

“What constitutes ‘fair’?” Light asked, just as quietly. When Naomi didn’t answer immediately, he continued. “Because it often seems to me that people - especially law enforcement - think the law *is* what’s fair.”

“It represents what the majority think is fair.” Naomi pointed out.

“It’s *meant* to, but how many people does it really represent?” Light wondered, aloud. “Changing laws and passing bills is unnecessarily difficult even when there’s just cause and in most countries, people either have no say in their governing body or the extent of their choices involves nominating someone else to act on their behalf instead of being allowed to act for themselves. It’s almost as if governments prefer to dictate to people what they’re allowed to choose for themselves.” Light gave a little smile.

Naomi looked at him carefully. “You’ve said what you cared about. What about the things you don’t?” She probably already suspected she wasn’t going to like the answer.

Light took a deep breath. It was now or never. This admission would definitely get a reaction. “I don’t care as much if innocent people who are falsely accused die.”

“Light!” Naomi looked at him in horror.

“Just hear me out.” Light held up a hand. “You don’t have to agree with what I say but just…listen.”

Naomi settled and after a moment’s pause, Light started. “There’s a difference between killing innocent people because it’s unavoidable

and doing it because it's *convenient* . I categorically cannot support and do not condone killing innocent people knowingly." Light took a breath. "Kira doesn't kill cops who aren't crooked and doesn't kill nonviolent criminals, so it seems that our ideals align there. On the other hand, people are falsely accused or framed for crimes all the time and while Kira may not always know someone's guilt for absolute certain, neither do the courts."

"Your belief in Kira stems from your skepticism of how well the legal system works." Naomi said with more understanding than she'd started out with.

"That and/or humanity in general." Light shrugged his shoulders.

"I get the feeling that you don't think justice in its truest form actually exists." Naomi probed.

"Just an incredibly rough approximation of it." Light acknowledged. "I don't think world peace will ever exist, while we're at it."

"Never?" Naomi asked.

"Not as long as humans exist. The nature of existence is chaos and pain in differing amounts." Light mused. "I don't think Kira's trying to create a perfect world, I don't think that could ever exist. I think they're just trying to create a safer world for more people for a short while."

"You don't think of Kira's way as a permanent fix?" Naomi asked in surprise. Light shook his head in response. "That's surprising…but I think a lot of people in your age group are disillusioned with the way the world is." Naomi tried to empathize. "But going to the extreme opposite isn't any better. It doesn't solve the system to go so much in

one direction."

"Maybe not." Light hummed. "But it feels right to me. Everyone must die, there's no getting around that. The only thing we get to choose is how someone dies and what they die for. I do think it's probably bad that I'd rather an innocent person be killed on accident than a guilty person go free. Morally, I probably shouldn't be okay with that, but it's what I feel. If people are too afraid to make a mistake that it paralyzes them, they'll never act or wait too long to do it and suffering still happens. If people suffer regardless, I hate the idea of it happening due to inaction more." Light gazed off as he spoke.

Naomi similarly fell into contemplation beside him. The minutes dragged on and he was beginning to wonder if she would speak again when her voice sliced through the silence. "I think I understand."

When Light turned to look at her, he saw her eyes weighed down with sadness and pain but clear of confusion and anger. Seeing it, Light thought, maybe she did.

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It took a few more days for Light to finally get to talk with Touta. Surprisingly, when he did, it was Touta who approached *him* . Light had started going back to school physically since he and L were no longer under surveillance. "For his safety", he was being picked up and dropped off on campus during weekdays. Normally it was Watari but sometimes he was busy and another team member would pick him up.

It was still a surprise when Touta showed up to pick him up one day after classes. "Hi, Light." Touta greeted with some discomfort when Light got into the car.

“Hi, Touta.” Light said warmly, sad at how nervous the man seemed around him. “Sorry you had to pick me up today.”

That got Touta to blink at him in surprise. There was an awkward pause as they sat in the car parked on the curb by his school gates. “I wasn’t asked…uh…I offered to do it today.” Touta rubbed the back of his head in discomfort and embarrassment.

Now that was a surprise. “Why did you do that?” Light asked. Because it was clear that Touta was still uncomfortable around him, even if he’d been slowly looking less skittish as the days went by.

“I…I wanted to talk to you.” Touta said, weakly.

“With the time you chose to do it, I think I can guess at what it’s about.” Light sighed, leaning back against his seat and refocusing on the man beside him.

“Yeah, I…” Touta’s grip on the steering wheel tightened until his knuckles were white, even as the car remained parked where it was. “I want to know why, Light.”

“You mean why I do it? I thought I told you that day.” They both knew what he was talking about.

“You didn’t really tell me. You said you cared but nothing else and is that true, Light?” Touta sounded stressed and Light felt sorry for that.

“It *is* true.” Light was a liar - although never as much as L - but he

really wanted Touta to believe that he cared about them all. He could accept Touta doubting his sanity, doubting his morality, doubting his incredibly dubious humanity, but he couldn't handle him entertaining the idea that Light didn't care.

"Then explain why you do it." Touta pleaded with him. "I didn't know if I could stand to talk about this before, but I've been thinking about it a lot. You said you wouldn't make excuses for yourself." Touta said quietly but - Light was surprised to note - with a new determination. "But I want to hear it. Please, Light, tell me why you do it." When Touta looked at him, his eyes practically pleaded with Light to tell him *something* . And Light really didn't have it in him to deny Touta that.

"I do it because it's effective." Light said. Touta blinked at him in confusion. It probably hadn't been what he expected. "I used to think that the world is rotten to the core. That it was beyond saving except by the most extreme measures. I don't quite think that anymore, but I don't think I was far off, either. This world is predicated on chaos. No amount of ordering is going to change that. It's fighting against the natural order."

"Uh, Light?" Touta said, brows furrowed deeply. "I'm not really sure I follow."

Light gave him a soft smile in response. "I don't expect you to, really. Let me see…another way of putting it is that I think the police and the current justice system are ineffectual."

Touta startled at the bluntness of his response. "But your father is a police officer!" He exclaimed in shock at Light.

"It's not that I don't respect my father, but it's not enough to change how I feel about the system. He's only human, he never would've been

able to stand against the worst of humanity at the volume it comes in. If the system isn't effective, then how can the police protect everyone?" Light gave him a speculative look. "Don't tell me you've never thought so yourself?" Because Light knew that he *had* .

All of the confessions Touta had made in a past life about sympathizing with Kira's rhetoric may have been made under pressure to back Light up and defend him, but he didn't believe for a second that any of them had been false.

Touta dropped into silence at his question, staring down at his hands in his lap. He didn't answer immediately, but Light allowed him his time as the minutes ticked by. "I've," Touta hesitantly started, his voice shaking. "I…might have thought that. Which makes it hard to be angry at you, Light, it really does. Especially since you're young." *So are you,* Light couldn't help but think sadly as he looked at him. "But Light, surely this isn't *right* ."

Light stared at Touta a little but the other man wouldn't look at him. Light sighed under his breath. "Stop me if you haven't had these thoughts before. 'Maybe Kira isn't all bad.' 'There are some people that the world would frankly be better without.' 'Kira's actions have actually done some good.' *'Maybe Kira has a point.'"*

Touta was staring at him now, eyes wide and mouth hanging open.

"What?" Light gave a crooked smile. "Did I read your mind?"

"Light…how…" Touta couldn't string two words together, it seems.

"Because a lot of people have thought that." Light told him gently. He wanted Touta to know that he wasn't alone in his thoughts, even if he was surrounded by people who made him feel like he was the strange

one for considering Kira's side. He had been holding his backpack on his lap. As he spoke, he pulled his laptop out of his bag and popped it open. He opened an incognito tab and typed in a webpage that he spent a lot of his free time on when he wasn't being surveilled.

He slid his open laptop into Touta's lap. The page Touta was greeted with was one of Kira's many fan pages on social media sites. People visited the page and posted their own thoughts and theories. In particular, this one had a lot of people who supported Kira sharing their personal experiences. Touta's eyes focused on the screen and then they started scanning.

Light could guess what he was seeing. Testimonies from several different accounts about how Kira had positively impacted people's lives or people who had suffered in the past and wished Kira could've been there at the time. People who were robbed, people who were abused or kidnapped, people whose loved ones were murdered, etc. People came together in the safe anonymity of the internet to share their stories and their personal motivations for why they supported Kira.

They told and listened to the stories that society didn't want to hear.

Touta suddenly made a choking sound and it made Light lean over to check the cause out. *Oh.* It was pretty obvious which one had gotten his attention. It was a story posted by a young woman who was abused by a police officer. As a police officer himself, he could imagine reading that account would be particularly difficult for Touta emotionally.

Light speed-read it. It seems the young woman had been sexually assaulted by an officer and the man had the upper hand in basically every way. He had a better understanding of the law and more training *and* more connections. She talked about how the other officers who were supposed to be investigating him weren't doing their jobs.

Then the officer in question started to harass her, causing damage to her property and driving around her street several times a day just to glare at her house. She'd been almost to the point of a complete mental breakdown when the officer died of a heart attack. Kira had saved her.

Light remembered that case. He'd hacked that police department's servers at one point to see what the police in that area were doing and saying about the case while it was active. It's not like he could follow entire conversations that way like he could if he bugged someone's phone or if he'd had Ryuk stalk the station. However, he could see notes and reports, as well as the tone in which the paper trail had been written and draw conclusions from those.

And from what he could gather, the officer was lying his ass off about what happened and the other officers were doing what they often did: protecting their own. Light didn't read malice from most of their actions. It seemed like they genuinely believed he wasn't guilty and they'd been trained to back each other up, which wasn't easy to simply turn off. It also looked like there was pressure from someone higher up on the chain of command to settle things without it getting to court.

Light had enough experience with those kinds of power structures to guess at the reason for that. It would open up their department to censure if it became widely known how one of their officers had been behaving. And the best way to push allegations like that under the rug was to invalidate the victim's claims.

Bullying the victim was also an option - clearly - but Light didn't see any evidence that the accused officer had been instructed to do that. He could just as well have been doing it on his own. People did desperate things when they were faced with the possibility of losing everything and a person who'd already been violent once had set a precedent. Still, with the complaint the victim had made about the continued harassment from the officer, it was incredibly unlikely that

his superiors didn't know he was doing it and were just looking the other way.

Light had a preference when he got involved in an ongoing case. Unlike in his previous life, when he was ready to drop a body at a mere accusation, he wanted to research thoroughly before he took anyone's life. And despite how it might appear to outsiders, he didn't completely distrust the work of law enforcement. How could he when he'd grown up seeing how hard his father and many of his coworkers worked?

The man oozed justice out of his pores. When Light was a little kid, he'd seen his father as a great hero, tracking on villains single-handedly. He didn't quite see it like that anymore, but the people who made up the legal system weren't all crooked or incompetent, either. He didn't think the established system was good enough, but he didn't think that was the fault of most of the people working within it who were just trying their hardest to make the flawed system work.

That all being said, he liked to wait until a case had actually been completed before he decided it had been screwed up. That, or if the law had failed to cotton on to a crime having occurred at all. In that case, he considered the ball to be firmly in his court. Besides, cases were well publicized these days and they were a treasure trove of information and testimonies that even hacking the police databases didn't hold a candle to. There were big reveals and new evidence, among other things, that really only came out during a trial.

There was one major factor for him to decide whether or not to get involved in an ongoing case. That being whether or not more harm could be done by who he believed the guilty party to be before the case was over.

Light found evidence supporting the woman's claims that the officer was routinely patrolling her street and found one additional unnerving detail. The vast majority of the time, the incidents appeared to be

during his off-hours. In other words, he was off the clock and not acting officially as an officer when he was doing that. You didn't need a law degree to say that behavior like that was inexcusable, regardless of his guilt in the other charges. Light knew that no falsely accused person acted that way. No, that was the behavior of someone guilty who didn't want to get caught.

At the time, Light had felt the pressure to determine the man's guilt for himself before the case concluded because of the man's violence and stalker tendencies. The potential was high for him to do real harm to this woman, maybe even kill her, in the near future. There was a reason that most people who had physically assaulted another were hailed in the interim, it protected the victims and/or witnesses in the critical time following the attack. The police in that area weren't protecting the woman and the rogue officer's behavior wasn't stopping.

It was worsening.

While Light didn't know for sure that the man was going to do something to her again, he recognized the slow escalation of behavior from what was - at this point - decades of experience in crime solving. He recognized the buildup that usually occurred before something terrible happened, usually an escalation of an already volatile situation. He tried not to let this bias his research or make him sloppy by rushing to close the case, even though his honed instincts had been putting him on edge.

This was one of the times when he felt that he needed to act sooner rather than later in order to prevent further harm. It was easier to remember each of his executions these days. His memory had always been pretty good, but he'd also been killing far less frequently in this lifetime. He was researching each criminal individually and thoroughly before acting, whereas before sometimes all he had looked at was their face and their name. Back then, he'd had too much of a black and white worldview in his first life to even consider giving suspected criminals that much consideration.

Heck, it wasn't uncommon for him to just glance at the news when they were announcing arrests and write down whoever they showed without even paying attention to what they were being accused of doing. Light thoroughly felt that he had been such a child. Perhaps his father's all-or-nothing views on morality had rubbed off on him in his own way, even if not in the way the man would've ever intended. At any rate, he wasn't proud of doing that, but the part of him that still preferred action over endless rumination still existed.

Light hazarded a glance at Touta to see how he was holding up after reading about that case. He cringed at what he saw.

The man was pale and shaking, looking like he was about to throw up. "That poor woman…" He choked out, looking as if he might cry at any moment.

"Sometimes the system fails people." Light said quietly. "And when it happens, it's usually pretty bad. For people who know what being at rock bottom looks like, Kira is an answer to their prayers when no one else hears their cries. These people feel like the system failed at its job to protect them and they'd been forgotten by society."

Light considered whether or not he wanted to say something before opening his mouth again. "The system prioritizes hard evidence and absolute proof because it endeavors to protect everyone in every situation, even the accused. That isn't wrong. But at its worst, what that looks like is people at rock bottom feeling like the law is protecting the attackers more than the victims. I wonder what the battle between L and Kira looks like from those people's perspectives?" Light said airily, eyes going slightly unfocused as he gazed off into the distance for a moment.

When a few seconds passed and he blinked back to the time and place, it was to see Touta staring at him with a complicated and pained

expression. “Something on your mind?” Light prompted him, absentmindedly.

“I…there are…” Touta’s brows furrowed in frustration at himself.

“Hey, hey.” Light put his hand on Touta’s shoulder without thinking and thankfully, the other man didn’t pull away. “It’s okay, just breathe and clear your mind. It’ll be easier to know what you want to say after you do that.”

Touta gave him a look of gratitude and followed his instructions. When he’d done that, he looked a little better as he started again. “There are more people supporting Kira than I thought there were. I don’t know why but the way they talk at the precinct, I thought there were less. And they don’t sound as…crazy as I thought they would. They sound so normal. Oh! Uh, wait, I didn’t mean that–” Touta immediately started to panic.

Light cut him off with a small laugh. If anything, it made him happy that Touta seemed to forget for a moment that he was talking to Kira. “It’s okay, I know what you meant to say. You were expecting more religious zealots in my fanbase, right?” Light asked, understandingly.

Touta gave a shy nod before looking back at the computer. “I guess…I hadn’t thought that much about it.”

“Maybe that’s its own crime.” Light said sadly, thinking of his own gross ignorance in the past. “Writing people with different views off without actually thinking their point through before casting judgment. Trying to see the world through their eyes and colored by their feelings. Even when we try to be understanding, it is still so easy to ignore what we find troublesome or inconvenient. Such is only human.” He lolled his head to the side to cast a morose smile at his friend.

A slightly awed look entered Touta's eyes, which he wasn't expecting. "You're very mature, Light." He offered.

"A saving grace for the world, given the situation." Light nodded. Before Touta could question his statement, Light continued. "So what are you going to do? I'm not assuming you're going to side with me, but is your asking me to justify myself to you now your acknowledgement that you aren't going to turn me in, either?"

"I don't want to turn you in, Light." Touta spoke so quietly that Light almost didn't hear it.

"That's good to hear." Light said with some relief.

"I couldn't stand that." Touta continued, unbidden. "But I couldn't do that anymore even if I wanted to, I shredded the evidence already."

…….

……

… "Excuse me, you did what?"

Chapter End Notes

Countdown: Something crazy in six chapters…

Those Who Keep Secrets

Chapter Summary

Light and L both realize that nothing is handled.

Chapter Notes

The chapter's lateeeeeeeee~

Let's hope the next one won't be!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Okay, so this was either very good or very bad.

Light couldn't help but stare at Touta out of the corner of his eye as he was driven back to the hotel. Naturally, it was taking them a while longer to get back because Near insisted that they take several wrong turns before going back to the hotel, in case they were followed.

It simply hadn't occurred to him that Touta would've made the decision to trust him so soon. When Touta had gone on to tell him about heading back to the police station and shredding the page, it had him absolutely shocked. Light had hoped that Touta would believe in him - like he always had - but he really hadn't thought the decision would be that quick.

Honestly, he was more than a little pleased to hear what his friend had done. Not just hiding the evidence somewhere but actually destroying it, giving up the hope of using it against him in the future…at least he didn't have to worry about Touta changing his mind in the future. He was all in now, even if he didn't realize it.

He was pleased with the thought.

And yet, even as one part of him relaxed at the information, another part continued to worry.

Light was a careful person by nature. At times like this, rather than congratulate himself on a job well done, he instead thought over and over until he was sure there was no possible way that things could go wrong. As it was, he couldn't quite overlook the idea that someone could go through the trash and tape the strips back together so that the paper could be read. It sounded crazy, but L had done weirder things. And Light didn't get to where he was now by not being cautious to the point of absurdity.

Of course, that was just an obscure threat and one that was only possible until that day's trash got taken out. Once it did, it didn't matter if it was recycled or tossed in a landfill, finding and combining all of the shreds would be impossible for anyone, even L. If he didn't have such faith in L's ability to take insane chances and bug everything he could get his hands on - including the police station - then he wouldn't even think on it any further, given that it required someone to go rooting through a specific trash can on a specific evening for they-have-no-idea-what.

But L was exactly the type to do something like that and it was causing Light's thoughts to go around in circles. Would it be unreasonable for him to ask Touta to go and check that the trash had been taken out for the week?

"Um, Light? I…ah…also wanted to ask about your…appearance." Touta said, hesitantly.

Light blinked in confusion. "My appearance? What about it?"

Touta shuffled uncomfortably in his seat. "Well…you see…uh, you look… *sometimes* you look like a monster?"

It was a good thing Light wasn't driving or the car would've screeched to a stop right then. “...are you speaking metaphorically?” He asked tonelessly, after a pause.

“...no?” Touta returned as if it were a question.

“What do I look like right now?” Light asked quietly.

“Well…” Touta started, hesitantly. “It’s hard to get a good look. Right now, you look normal, but now and then, another appearance will fade over you. It’s there and gone so quick, but…but it’s taller than you, maybe six and a half feet tall? It has gray skin and a skeleton face.”

Light stared at him with his mouth hanging open because the man had just described how he looked as a Shinigami. After a long silence, “How long have you been seeing that?” He thought he knew when it started but he had to be sure.

“Since I found the paper in your room.” Touta said in a quiet voice that sounded much louder in the quiet car.

Light said in a very low voice, “Touta, I need you to do something for me immediately.”

“What is it?” Touta asked, looking worried. “After you drop me off back at the hotel, I need you to go back to the station and ask about when the trash was taken out. Do you know when it’s usually collected during the week?”

“I-It’s collected on Wednesdays. So…yesterday, I think.” Touta answered him, radiating confusion.

“Okay. Okay.” Light said, more to himself, as he ran his hand over his face. *No wonder he was so freaked out the last few days if he was seeing that this whole time,* Light realized distantly but he didn’t have time to pay the thought much attention because the most important thing was– “Touching my notebook allows someone to see my other form.” Light muttered the words under his breath, coming to the realization himself, more than anything.

“Um, sorry, Light? Your–your other…?” Touta jumped a little.

Light hadn’t thought that could happen. He knew that his Shinigami core had followed him to this life, but he was living a human life in a human body. Arguably, a human body from before he died and became a Shinigami. He wouldn’t have thought that the rule about being able to see the form of the Shinigami whose Death Note you touched would apply to him in these circumstances. Ryuk had even told him that he could probably get away with a lot more than the average Shinigami because he’d been returned to his human life for now.

But now? It was crystal clear to him that it did. And that meant that anyone who touched the paper - *if* anyone did - would be able to see *him* . The real him.

“I’ll explain later. First, we need to make sure that trash got taken out safely.” Light told him, pulling himself together. “I need you to go back to the police station and make sure the trash is gone. Then I need you to ask whoever was working the desk that evening and make sure no one really touched the trash before it got taken out. Do you know who was working the desk the afternoon that you shredded it?”

“No, I don’t.” Touta shook his head. “I wasn’t there for long. No one was at the desk when I went in.”

“Okay, go in and ask about who it was. When you find out, call them and ask. Try not to make it sound weird but I need to know that nothing strange happened regarding that trash between the time that you shredded the paper and it got taken out by the janitor or whoever it was.” It had just been a few days since then. If something weird had happened with the trash that the desk officers would have seen, they’d probably still remember. Better to act quickly and put his mind at ease, especially with the information he now had. Once that trash had been taken out, it was basically no longer a threat so he just had to make sure nothing happened *before* that.

~ ❶ ~

Light did his best to not look like he was ready to crawl out of his own skin with anxiety while he was supposed to be working in their latest hotel. They’d just moved to the new one. Light would need to broach the topic of Kira HQ with L sooner rather than later because continuing to change hotels even now was ridiculous. They both knew he was Kira and everyone on the team either knew that L thought Light was Kira or were suspicious of L being Kira himself. They shouldn’t need to go on with farces like that anymore.

It was with thoughts like that that Light managed to distract himself enough to not jump up and start pacing while he waited for Touta to call him back. Light made sure that Touta knew before they went their separate ways that when he got the all-clear, he needed to call Light because they couldn’t speak freely inside the hotel.

Light almost jumped out of his skin when his phone actually rang and he quickly whipped it out to take the call. “Sorry, excuse me for a minute. I should take this.” He excused himself from the room and went out into the hallway before answering the call. He would’ve

liked to go out in front of the hotel to talk since he was sure the floor of the hotel and the lobby were just as laced with surveillance devices as the rooms were, but there was no way to do that without looking suspicious so he'd have to make do with this much.

"Hey, how's it going?" Light answered the call, making sure to keep his language as casual as possible for the cameras.

"Uh…good? Do you wanna hear what I found out? I asked around." Touta answered, sounding confused by Light's casual greeting.

"Mmhm." Light hummed in affirmation.

"Okay, so there might be a problem." Touta started, hesitantly.

No one ever wanted to continue a conversation that started like that.

"I found the person working the desk that night and at first, they were pretty confused about why I was asking around about the trash. I told them I'd shredded a document by accident and when I panicked and tried to find all the pieces of the paper in the shredder, I lost my mother's ring that she left me when she passed away. I only realized now so I wanted to know if anyone had found it before the trash got taken out. And well, Mr. Shimizu - um, that was the desk officer that night, Mr. Shimizu - he suddenly remembered that early that evening, someone came by and actually asked to come behind the desk and take the bag of shredded paper from inside the shredder."

"Someone did *what?* " Light shrieked, forgetting for a brief moment to keep his cool.

“Y-Yeah!” Light could practically hear Touta jump on the other end of the line. “This person...apparently they said that they’d visited the station earlier and shredded something but they realized now that they needed it and they asked the officer if he had a problem with them taking it with him so that he could maybe put the paper back together. Shimizu thought it was a little weird, he said, but he didn’t see anything wrong with it, so he let the guy take it. The time he gave me for when that happened would’ve been really soon after I’d left.”

Put the paper back together . The words rang in Light’s head like the tolling of a bell. Was the stranger using that particular excuse just a coincidence..?

Like hell it was! As far as Light was concerned, that was as good as an admission that this person - whoever he was - had known what he was doing when he asked for the bag of shredded paper. How they knew, he didn’t know. Maybe someone had seen what Touta had done at the station? They must have! Or maybe they’d followed them all the way from the hotel? Did they figure out which hotel they were staying at at the time even after L’s weird precautions?

If he had been less preoccupied with those kinds of thoughts, he would’ve made sure to appreciate how much information Touta had managed to get out of the desk officer. It was in little moments like that that Touta showed that he was truly an investigator for the JPD.

“Light, there’s one more thing.” Touta intruded on his thoughts with audible nervousness. Light waited for him to continue. “The description Shimizu gave matched Ryuzaki pretty much perfectly.”

He should’ve *known* . It was always L.

But that wasn't possible though, because Light had been with L during–Wait.

But he hadn't been, had he? After Touta had dropped him off, Watari had greeted him, not L. That wasn't unusual, but that meant he hadn't actually seen L until after Touta returned because he'd asked to talk to his dad first. That might make it physically possible for L to have shown up at the station after Touta and then gotten back before Light went to see him.

But does it make sense for L to have done that? Light's mind insistently asked of him. L had only chosen to show himself to a select few people, especially important after Light started killing. Additionally, L had a distinct appearance. Did it make sense for him to go to the station in person instead of sending Watari to do it?

Light wasn't sure what to think, but he knew that something about this didn't sit right with him. Something made him feel suspicious of jumping to the most obvious conclusion. Then again, he had never been the most eager to jump to conclusions, anyway. Light spent a little more time thinking about it but no matter what angle he took with the situation, he realized the inescapable truth: that the only step he could take towards finding out what happened was talking to L about it. L would block him if he asked for security camera footage of the police station, so it was really his only option.

It practically took Light seconds before he found the room where L was. Ryuk was floating behind him joking about Light having L Sonar, but really it was just that L and the investigators used the same few rooms over and over again despite renting out the whole hotel floor. Light pushed the door open and encountered L and his father alone in the room. It wasn't uncommon these days for L to do most of his work alone in another room and either go to visit the main room or have others come visit him when they needed to discuss something.

Now that Light thought about it, he'd been doing that routinely ever since Near (metaphorically) shackled them together, but it had kind of started even before that. Maybe around the time Misa accused L of being Kira in front of the entire team. *That makes sense, Aizawa and*

some of the others weren't comfortable around L from the beginning and after that incident, the air was positively hostile. L probably started removing himself physically to not distract from the investigation. He wouldn't leave entirely, though. Stubborn L. Light wiped the wry smile off his face as both of the men turned to look at him.

"Hi, Hideki! Dad. What are you guys up to?" Light had to remind himself to keep using L's fake name in front of the other investigators. He'd play L's little game to not undermine him any further in front of the others, even if he was going to drop that pretense the moment they were alone. And maybe part of it was lingering fondness for their first meeting and the little lies about their lives that they built up together. "L" belonged to the whole team and the world governments, but "Hideki" was only his.

L was in front of his computer setup and his dad was sitting next to him. Light honestly couldn't tell if they were talking about something or working on something on said computer.

"Hello, Light." His dad said, giving him a warm smile. "How was your day at college?"

"Easy." Light answered with a crooked smile. Unfortunately, whatever difficulty he'd found in his classes in his previous life had basically disintegrated now. Even with some of the classes being different, he wasn't the same kid he was last time. "What were you guys doing?"

"We were just discussing some things about the case between the two of us. Nothing to worry your head about." His dad said without glancing at L.

"Indeed, but since Light is here, I imagine he wanted to say something." L stated without looking at him initially, but then he wheeled his chair around to face him.

“I guess you could say that.” Light gave a fake amiable laugh, the kind his father would buy and L would be suspicious of. “I actually wanted to discuss something about the case too, but I was hoping to speak to L alone first. That’s okay, right?”

Light wasn’t sure if he was imagining the slight tightening of his father’s eyes, but he suspected he wasn’t. Still, his dad’s only response was, “Of course it’s alright. Come see me when you two are done with your talk and we’ll talk more about how our days went.”

He’s trying to bond, Light realized. He gave his dad a soft smile as the man passed him. “Sure thing, Dad. That sounds great.” And then he and L were left alone and the room dropped into silence.

Light took the moment to consider one more time if he should really talk to L about this. He’d brought some startling things up to L in the past that most people would’ve kept quiet, but he was nervous about this one. Still, the on;y way that he stood to learn more about what he was facing here was if he asked L about it. He was instinctively wary of leading L to conclude that the scraps of paper meant something but if he had indeed already taken them, then the point was moot. Meanwhile, L had turned back to his computer while he presumably let Light think.

Besides, Light reasoned as he got ready to speak his mind. He ventured further into the room and took the same seat near L that his dad had just vacated. *No relationship survives without proper communication.*

“Hey, L?” Light called out to him. “Yes, Light?” L didn’t look up from his computer but he did stop typing.

Light couldn’t prevent the small smile from appearing on his face. He

knew that meant he had L's full attention. "I heard something interesting today."

"Something that concerns me, I presume?" L monotoned with a slight air of interest.

Light hummed. "Someone interesting showed up at the police station." He baited, trying to see if L showed any kind of reaction to his vague words.

"I'd appreciate it if you told me without putting it off any further." L said, giving nothing away.

Light switched tact to something more direct. "Were you at the police station in the afternoon last Saturday?"

"Wasn't that the day you went to visit your sister?"

"Yeah, it was. Were you there?"

"No, I can't say that I was." L said calmly. "I stayed in the hotel the entirety of the time."

Light didn't respond. He didn't know if he could trust what L said, given his usual habits, but he really did think he knew L well at this point. It felt like L was lying right right then.

"Why do you ask?"

“Huh?” Light made a confused sound as he was jerked out of his thoughts.

“Where I was at that time. Why do you ask?” L repeated.

That was the unfortunate question Light had known would happen when he chose to broach the subject with L. Well, if L really didn’t know what this was about, then he had the perfect excuse. “Touta told me someone saw you there.”

L’s lips tugged downward slightly. “Someone saw me at the police station?” He looked to be thinking the information over.

“Yes, it’s very unlike you.” Light pointed out.

“Being seen?” L questioned.

Light nodded. “Why would you go somewhere like that when you could just send someone to do it for you? It’s not very like you.”

“No, it’s not…” L muttered vacantly and Light could practically hear the gears in his mind grinding.

“This person must’ve looked a lot like you.” Light pointed out. “Since your appearance is so distinctive.”

“And what did this person who must’ve looked very similarly to me do

at the police station?" L asked and Light's trained ears could pick up the palpable interest he was now showing in this person, which convinced the last part of him that L really didn't know about this.

Light spent a brief moment considering if he should lie or not, but he decided quickly enough that telling the truth - or at least the partial truth - would serve his purposes better here. "Apparently, he went rooting through the trash and then just left."

"They must have been looking for something specific." Was L's immediate response.

This was how L always managed to impress him. He was so quick in his conclusions and jumped right over disbelief into what the motivation for doing something so weird like that and then just leaving would be. Light could also tell that this was meant to be a question to him even if it wasn't really phrased that way.

"I don't know what they were after, but considering how quickly they left, they might've found it." Light wasn't sure if L bought all of what he said but the best way to get a lie past an observant person was to blend it with truth.

L hummed and briefly went silent, pressing his thumb harshly against his lip in deep contemplation. If it had been any other situation, Light would have smiled at the cute gesture, but this unknown variant was bothering him too much.

Still, he knew how much L hated being interrupted when he was thinking hard about something, so he stayed silent. But as the seconds ticked by, Light felt a particular feeling slowly dawning on him and then it got stronger. He began to get the nagging feeling that L knew something about this. It was just a feeling.

“Do you have something you want to share with the class, L?” Light prodded him, gently. “It looks like you’re thinking something.” *It looks like you know something.*

“Not particularly.” L stated simply and after waiting a few seconds, Light realized that he wasn’t planning to explain further.

Annoyance peaking through his voice, Light said, “Really? Because I get the *distinct* feeling that whatever you’re thinking is something I should know about.”

The fact that the next thing out of L’s mouth was sidestepping this accusation rather than tackling it head-on, solidified Light’s suspicion that he was onto something. “I assure you that the situation is under control.” L said.

“The situation has never been under control.” Light pointed out.

L gave an annoyed rumble under his voice. “Nonetheless, I will look into this on my end. I intend to mention it to N and Watari, as well, if that makes you feel any better.”

It didn’t, but not because there was something wrong with Near. He just didn’t take well to not knowing something, he never had. Problem was: he also knew L very well. L currently had that set to his shoulders that told Light no more information was going to be forthcoming and any further attempt to push for him to open up would be met with intense suspicion. It was irritating, but Light managed to bite back on it with his usual level of grace. At least for the moment.

But he *would* find out what was going on.

~ ⓚ ~

Near wasn't sure what to do. He'd cleared Light and L to the rest of the team - tentatively - but he hadn't actually meant what he'd said. Not completely. Nothing suspicious had been caught on camera while he was watching the two, even if their incessant need to be close to each other made other facts blatantly obvious, but Kira was the planning type so that was to be expected. Especially since they still didn't know how Kira killed. Though Near had a pet theory that Kira killed with the power of his mind, similar to telekinesis.

So while his reasoning to the team had been true, he hadn't quite divulged his inner thoughts about it. Specifically, about Light. About how he didn't actually think Light was trustworthy. And there was only one reason why he didn't say any of the things he thought about it to anyone else yet.

Near liked having Light around.

He'd never met anyone quite like him. No one had comforted him like he did. Light had given him his coat and it had felt so big and warm that…that Near had felt warm, too. Was this what having a big brother was like?

Near didn't know if he had any real siblings. He didn't remember his parents, not even a little. As far as he could remember, he'd always been at Wammy's House. There were many kids that could've been older siblings to him, but none of them saw each other as siblings. It was like how he imagined a school to be. They were taught around each other but few of them were close.

He hadn't thought that the concept of having an older sibling to be particularly important. Just a fact or a statistic. He hadn't expected the *warmth* . Were older siblings always so warm and comforting?

Near was also reasonably sure that Light was Kira. It was less that he had concrete evidence for believing it and more that his intuition was telling him that was the case and Near trusted his instincts.

He had a very old childhood memory of L talking to a group of children at Wammy's, himself included.

The detective had said that instincts and intellect were what made a good detective. Near liked to trust his instincts, as well. When they had been told by Roger that L needed assistance in a case and he'd read the information they had gathered so far, Near had decided that he wouldn't allow himself to be biased by L's beliefs. If he was being brought in to determine L's innocence or guilt and lead the investigation in the interim, then tha is what he would do.

Mello had been incensed by the insinuation that L might be Kira, but Near had thought at the time that it was a reasonable suspicion. Given Kira's obvious intelligence, apparent insider knowledge, and the lack of progress in the Kira Case, Near thought he fit the mold well enough to arouse at least some suspicion.

So he would investigate L as if they had no ties to each other at all, which went disappointingly quickly in his apprehension.

L gained nothing by going out of his way to make himself look like a joke on live TV. Besides, there were too many technological impossibilities involved in being both L and Kira at the same time, especially without leaving hard evidence rather than the purely circumstantial theorizing they currently had.

Near wasn't going to announce that to L or the team just yet, though. He might as well sit on the knowledge for a while. After Near had determined that L wasn't Kira, he turned his attention to the other wrinkle.

Light Yagami appeared - for all intents and purposes - to be a spanner in the investigation. A gremlin messing with the machinery. From the written record he'd been presented with, it seemed that the Kira Investigation had derailed the moment Light Yagami became heavily involved and it never got back on the track.

In truth, things had not been going quite in L's favor since the first contact with Kira. However, from the moment that cameras had been placed in the Yagami house onwards, the entirety of the case began to slowly be consumed by him. Whether this was intentional on Light's part remained to be seen. As it was, very little had been done after that point to pursue other suspects, to the obvious consternation of the JPD. This frustration had long ago begun to be a point of contention between the local law enforcement and L himself.

In short, the Kira Case had become a circus and Near couldn't grasp how L had so thoroughly mismanaged the situation, especially as such an experienced detective. The further the investigation team's dissatisfaction with L went, the less they wanted to work with him and the further derailed the Kira Case became. If this continued for much longer, the situation could become irredeemable and require a whole new team to be put together to wipe the slate clean.

It wasn't that Near didn't agree with Light as a suspect, but he didn't agree that he was made the centerpiece of the case, especially since L had nothing to show for it. If his instincts were correct and Light was Kira, as Near felt was the case, he was *very* good. He was prone to neither bursts of emotion nor being sloppy in his work.

Light Yagami was a meticulous person, regardless of criminal activity. The odd thing was that Near was unsure what he would do should he obtain evidence of Light's guilt. He still remembered that warmth. The only option they had if they wanted to bring Kira to justice was to kill him themselves. They couldn't possibly arrest him, knowing what he was capable of.

Near doubted that there was a government in the world that would pass up the chance to draft someone into service who had the supernatural ability to kill people without being present. No greater weapon for political assassination and mass destruction than Kira existed. It would be irresponsible to take Kira in without passing a death sentence.

One that they would have no choice but to carry out themselves.

~ ❶ ~

The room Matt and Mello were in was filled with an awkward silence as Mello worked and it had been for days, now. So many times, Mello had opened his mouth to try and say something, anything, to his oldest friend only to come up with nothing.

Matt had eventually come back to him after storming off, but following their fight on Saturday, they'd been awkward and quiet around each other. Mello had never apologized and if Matt had actually expected him to, he didn't say anything about it. He didn't say much of anything. He just chose to bury himself even deeper in his games, instead.

He *was* actually sorry about the argument. He knew he'd lost it a little bit and hurt Matt, but every time he opened his mouth, he found himself at a loss of what to say about it. So he ended up saying nothing.

As if the issues going on between them weren't bad enough, that night he'd gotten a call where he got taken to task by Wammy and then L.

To his complete and utter surprise, apparently Light had gone and told L about Mello snooping around in his house! He absolutely hadn't seen that coming. Light Yagami should have the most to hide out of all of them and he went tattling to L about *him!*

Because of that guy, Mello got such an earful from his idol. It'd been really hard to stay quiet as they tore into him for what he did, but trying to explain himself only ever made the situation worse. It felt like it went on forever, but it basically boiled down to them telling him to stay in his lane.

Mello had absolutely no intention of staying in his lane.

He'd spent years now playing second fiddle and he wasn't going to do it anymore! L and Wammy both thought that Mello was inferior to Near, but he could show them he wasn't. He could prove it, he just needed to push a little further. Then he could be the only successor… and maybe things between him and Matt could go back to normal.

As if he'd caused it to happen with the power of his mind, his phone suddenly rang and Mello practically tripped over himself trying to answer it. Only two people had the number to this phone and he wasn't looking forward to whatever lecture they were going to give him now. He hadn't even done anything else yet!

"Yeah?" Mello asked as he answered.

"M," Wammy's voice came through the speakers. "I'm calling to warn

you both to get prepared. L and N are going to be visiting your hotel in approximately thirty minutes. L wants to speak to you about something."

Hearing this, Mello panicked. "What did I even do this time?! I've barely been doing anything besides boring online research since you guys got mad about my last 'field mission'! Is L mad at me or something?" *Is he disappointed in me **again** ?*

"No, it's not about anything you've done this time." Whammy assured him, disinterestedly. "No, it's something much more severe, I'm afraid. This case just got significantly more dangerous, I'm afraid, and you two need to be updated."

Mello was just getting ready to ask how the case had gotten more dangerous when they were already going after the worst serial killer in history, but the line cut off before he could. Wammy had hung up on him.

Mello just held the phone in his hand and stared down on it with rising apprehension.

What could've possibly happened?

Chapter End Notes

Something crazy in five chapters…

Secrets & Lies

Chapter Summary

L becomes convinced that Light has an ex-boyfriend.

Chapter Notes

If you've seen the Death Note Musical, you'll know where I got the title of this chapter from.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light found himself playing possum for the next couple of hours. That is, he put on his mild mannered mien and pretended to mind his own business. Meanwhile, Ryuk was following L to wherever he was going.

As if Light would just let L get away with keeping whatever this was a secret from him. Though it was annoying that L took Near with him for whatever this was. Light still didn't like that Near was being roped into this dangerous stuff even though he was really too young.

He loved L, but that didn't mean he was going to roll over and let that slide. He could let people think he was behaving himself, though, and let Ryuk scope out the situation. L had excused himself quickly after Light brought up the L-sighting at the police station, despite Light's attempt to get him to hang around longer. It was pretty obvious L was leaving to deal with the information Light had given him and considering he hadn't heard from Ryuk in a while, L had probably left the hotel.

If nothing else, that convinced Light that L was taking this seriously. The man was more of a recluse than most monks.

While he waited for Ryuk to return with the report on whatever L left to deal with, he spent his time in the main investigation room,

reacquainting himself with how the case was going now that he was allowed to work on it again. This was the first time he sat down and took a comprehensive look at what all had changed in the case since Near had jumped onboard and it was surprisingly a lot.

Light had never really stopped to think about what Near was doing most of the time while he and L were together. He obviously wouldn't be watching him, he had a team to lead. It was probably Watari watching them for the most part and then Near going over the recordings later.

Near had actually been pretty busy. He'd set up a rotation system that hadn't been in practice before and he wrote up profiles of all the investigators, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. He could imagine how well Aizawa had taken that. Notably, Light's section was surface-level and underdeveloped, indicating to him that there was a real bio for him somewhere that he wasn't allowed to see.

Light caught sight of Near's toys sitting in a corner and found himself thinking deeply about them. Near didn't have any when he first arrived, so he must have had Watari go out and buy them after he'd arrived. Still, there weren't that many, despite the fact that Light knew these people had more money than God. *Thus must be limiting* , Light considered. He knew how Near used those to think.

It must be harder for him to visualize his ideas when he doesn't have as much to work with…

And then Light got a great idea.

~ ❶ ~

Ryuk held onto the roof of the car as he went along for the ride. It

took so many turns and went in so many circles that Ryuk almost felt sick. He'd never felt sick in his entire existence, but he imagined this is what it felt like.

L really was paranoid to make his butler drive like this whenever he wanted to go anywhere. What was he even so afraid of? Light wasn't even trying to kill him anymore! The Shinigami had completely lost track of where they were by the time the car pulled into the parking lot of another hotel and stopped in a private area. Ryuk had no idea how far they were from the hotel Light was in, which he guessed was the point.

When L, Nate, and the Butler - Quillsh - got out of the car, Ryuk jumped down and glided behind him. He followed them into the elevator and up several levels, neither of them being any the wiser. The whole time he was grumbling to himself about the things he did for Light. For a spying mission, this was pretty boring. It better get more interesting soon.

Ryuk flew out into the hallway the moment the elevator opened and when Quillsh opened one of the doors, he darted in through the door before either of the two had gone in, impatient to see something interesting.

Oh, the mini mafioso, he cackled when he saw Mihael, the boy calling himself Mello, and Mail, the boy calling himself Matt, already in the room. Ryuk mentally labeled them "the one Light hates" and "the one Light doesn't care about".

He raised his eyebrows in interest when he caught the quick scathing look Mihael shot Nate before glancing away from him. *The drama.* Unfortunately, the kid was smart enough not to say anything in front of L. Instead, he kept quiet as L, Quillsh, and Nate took their seats.

For a moment, the tension in the room was so heavy that even Ryuk got a little serious as he waited to see what they said. In the end, it was Quillsh that spoke first. “As I mentioned in the last message I sent the both of you, a new development has occurred that unfortunately takes this case in a more dangerous direction.” The butler informed both Mihael and Mail.

Both boys sat up straighter at the reminder, looking anxious. “Is it Kira?” Mihael demanded to know.

“Unfortunately, I could not go into detail in writing, but no, it is not Kira.” Quillsh informed them.

L took this moment to speak up. “We have reason to believe that BB has reappeared in Japan.”

Both boys could’ve been electrocuted with the way they stiffened at that information. The complete shock on their faces contrasted with Nate’s, which remained impassive.

Who was this BB and why did he cause this kind of reaction just by being mentioned? Ryuk was instantly curious.

“What?!” Mihael burst out, lurching forward in his seat. “He’s *here?!* ”

“It does appear that way.” L said.

“How? Wasn’t he in prison? How did he get out?” Mihael questioned.

“We are still investigating how he escaped. As for how we didn’t realize about his escape, that appears to have been an oversight on my part.” Quillsh sighed. “Upon investigation, it seems that he convinced a few of the other prisoners to cover for his absence, including bribing one to pretend to be him and, apparently, one of the guards was in on it. Law enforcement have yet to be able to induce any of them to divulge what B used to bribe them. Even the officer wasn’t very forthcoming. All he has done since being caught was sob incoherently about doing it for his niece.

“At any rate, because of this, he was able to escape without either L or myself being informed of it until we contacted the prison to check in on him. Indeed, we had no idea he was out in the general populace until just recently, when we got a report citing his presence here in Japan.”

“Does that mean he hasn’t been killing again?” Mail asked.

“We can find no evidence that he has been killing since his escape.” L acknowledged. “If he *had* been killing using his usual M.O., we would have known about his escape far earlier.”

“If he’s not going back to his old tricks, then what do you think he’s doing?” Mihael looked to L for guidance.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Nate answered, instead. “He’s here because L’s here and he hasn’t been killing so he could fly under the radar and maintain the element of surprise.”

His answer earned a death glare from Mihael and Ryuk chuckled. The kid had always been more bloodthirsty and ruthless than any Shinigami he’d ever met.

“That is our current theory.” L agreed, making Mihael’s expression go even more sour. “As for what he wants and what his plans are, we aren’t certain yet. Currently, we’re looking for him, but we have no idea how long he has been here under our very noses. In the meantime, we must make preparations accordingly. Whatever he is planning, we’ll be ready for it.”

“What makes it worse.” L said. “Is that Light is the one who informed me about his presence.”

At this, Mikhail jumped to his feet. “He *knows?!* ”

“Calm yourself.” Quillsh reprimanded him. “He doesn’t seem to know who B actually is and we need to keep it that way.”

L hummed in agreement. “To that end, you are going to divert your attention away from Light for now and investigate BB’s reported appearance at the Japanese Police Department. After that, check as many camera feeds of the streets as possible. Try and locate where BB has been and if anyone where he’s been staying.”

“Wait, am I off the Kira Case now?” Mikhail asked in disbelief. “What about Near?”

“You’re not off the case, this is just a new aspect of it. As for Near, he’ll continue as he had been in the investigation since he’s already been introduced to the Japanese investigators, and I have yet to gain their full trust back. We can’t afford to take our attention fully off Light. Near will continue to investigate Light on my behalf while you turn your attention to BB.”

“But that’s not fair!” Mikhail burst out, sounding both angry and desperate.

“Please do remember that you are an investigator.” Quillsh told him. “And maintain some control over yourself. This is why you cannot interact directly with suspects in the Kira Case.”

Reluctantly, Mikhail sat down, not saying anything in response.

Quillsh continued. “You’re here to help in any way that we need you and right now, our concern has shifted to B. We expect you to shift your focus to him accordingly.”

There was an awkward silence for a few seconds while Mikhail glared at the floor.

“Is there a chance that B might have been Kira all along?” Matthew asked.

“A vague possibility but an unlikely one.” L said. “If this had been B, Kira would have left some kind of messages after their killings that alluded to who he was. There is a good chance that he will start killing again soon, however.”

Ryuk hovered by the group for a while, but they were done talking about this “B” person – or was it BB? – and they weren’t talking about something else interesting, so he eventually took off to get some more tasty info before returning to Light. He flew out in front to get a look at the name of the hotel and then swept around the area to see the location. He knew Light would be happy with the additional information on where to find that Mikhail kid that was bothering him.

That, and he needed to know where the hotel was to see how far it was and how to get back.

~ ❶ ~

When L returned to the hotel and slithered back to the room he was using as his own, Light did what he always did and waited a short while before making his excuses and going to join L in his research. L barely said a word to him from the moment he got to the room and the two of them ended up doing their research on their respective computers with only the sound of clicking filling the room.

“Light, I’ve been thinking about something related to that for a little while.” L broke the comfortable silence between them quite suddenly after a while.

Though startled, Light quickly closed his laptop and turned to give L his full attention. “And that is?” Light smiled, encouragingly.

“Theoretically,” L started, slowly. “If I *did* develop feelings for you, I don’t think it would be how you idealize it as being.”

“Meaning?” Light asked with a smile.

“I am a very selfish person, Light. As you have pointed out several times, I don’t care about morality or ‘doing the right thing’. I am unsure of what kind of love you would be expecting from me, but I’d likely be incapable of the kind your parents have for each other, for example.”

“Well, that’s good, because that thought gives me chills.” Light said, surprisingly.

“Excuse me?” L asked, started by the reaction. “I was under the impression that most children from functional families idolize their parents’ relationship and wish to recreate it.”

Light paused. “There might have been a time when I thought I would have a relationship like my parents.” L’s eyes flicked up to Light’s face and what he saw disconcerted him. Light’s eyes were hazy and distant, showing his mind was somewhere else. L was ravenous for the knowledge of where Light’s mind went when he was like that. “But I never wanted it. There was a time when I thought my future was all laid out for me. Written in stone and all I had to do was read it out and then one day I looked around and I realized something. Any guess as to what it was?”

L didn’t respond verbally but raised an eyebrow in curiosity. Understanding the gesture, Light continued. “My world was colorless. Lifeless. I was living just to live and then I’d die.” Well, that certainly sounded dark for someone named Light. “But from the moment I woke up and took a good look at my life, I decided to change the way I was living my life.

“I don’t want my parents’ lives or their relationship. My dad killed himself for a job that just continued to take. My mom’s whole life revolves around taking care of the household and the family while her absentee husband works himself to death. They’ve lived the perfect cookie-cutter life with a house and two children, but they’ve never left the country even for their honeymoon. It’s hard for me to imagine living a life like that, I’d feel too limited. You know, now that I think about it, I admire that about you, L.”

“What is?” L cast his mind back over everything Light just said.

“You’ve lived such a full life already even though you aren’t that much older than me. On top of that, you’re not like my dad and I can

respect that." Light answered, radiating honesty.

L briefly wondered if he was ever going to stop being surprised by Light Yagami. L was aware that he and Soichiro Yagami couldn't be any more different, but ordinarily the comparison wasn't a favorable one to himself. Mr. Aizawa alone had made numerous comments about how hard it was to work with and respect L compared to their chief.

Even if Light had issues with his father… "I thought you respected how much your father put into his career."

"I *do* respect his dedication." Light nodded. "But you have that, too."

L *was* dedicated to this case, but it still surprised him that Light recognized it so easily. "Wasn't it you that said you don't believe that I want to capture Kira for moral reasons and that I'm being dishonest with my intentions?"

"And what exactly does morality have to do with it?" Light scoffed with raised eyebrows. "People can be dedicated to something with entirely selfish motives. And considering that the detective that's infamous for choosing all his cases and never showing himself is sitting in front of me right now, I'd say you're dedicated. I bet you'd be willing to die for this case; you're already risking yourself just like everyone else here. But you have something my dad doesn't have."

"Which would be?" L inquired, considering that it may be his genius-level IQ.

"Healthy boundaries."

L stared at Light in bewilderment. He had never been accused of having healthy boundaries in his entire life.

"Look, like you said, I'm not going to pretend you're the man with the most healthy mindset I've ever seen - because you're *not* - but your self-interested nature has good points that I don't think you recognize. For example, you draw lines with your career that my dad never could. You pick and choose which cases you involve yourself with while dad would take anything that anyone tossed on his plate. He wouldn't be able to say no. You work all the time, but it's because it intrigues you while my dad just runs himself into the ground for the sake of others.

"If you lost interest in a case, I have no doubt that you would pick up and leave the same day. My dad would stick it out until the end, no matter what it cost him. Maybe not everyone would respect you for that, but I do. I don't see it as being cowardly or selfish. Having boundaries on what you're mentally and emotionally willing to give is not selfish, it's something everyone should do and it's something people in this field have consistent problems with."

Ah, that made sense, actually. Much of Light's problems with his father stemmed from the man not being present in his life or rather, the presence that his being a police officer had in all of their lives. It made sense that Light, if anyone, would appreciate someone drawing the line in their work. It also made sense of why Light wouldn't want to be with someone like his father. He could see the logic clearly in that…light. Anyways. "To be fair to your father, it is no doubt difficult to balance being a detective alongside having a family."

"No doubt." Light agreed easily enough, but his expression didn't share that agreement.

L chose to move along rather than pursue that trajectory for the conversation. "But surely there is one aspect of your parent's relationship that you wish to emulate?"

“Which would be..?” Light questioned.

“Your parents appear to have a loving relationship. I imagine you want that, as well.” L could not imagine the affectionate Light not wanting that.

Light, who spoke so often of love. Light, who became protective of any child he came across. Light, who was incredibly affectionate - even towards L, who gave him little to be affectionate over. Perhaps he didn’t want to follow in his footsteps. He didn’t want to marry someone like his father, either, but L couldn’t see him not wanting to emulate that aspect of their relationship.

At his proclamation, Light stared at him with clear surprise and it took the younger man some time to respond. “I suppose you’re right about that.” Light said slowly. “I’m surprised you noticed that.”

L felt a slight twinge of annoyance. “I assure you that I am more than observant enough to notice that much.”

Light gave a soft laugh. “That’s not how I meant it. It’s just unexpected since you don’t normally trouble yourself with people’s feelings. You’re *improving* .” Light crooned.

L might have been inclined to read that as condescending if it weren’t for the excited smile Light had at making that observation. For his part, L didn’t know what he thought about this change in him that Light supposedly saw but Light’s clear happiness was a little pleasant to see. He would admit that privately to himself.

“But maybe you’re right with what you said about your limitations

when it comes to the love my parents have." Light said, thoughtfully. "Your love probably wouldn't look like my mom's completely selfless love that drives her to support her overworked husband and two children without asking for anything in return."

L didn't bother responding to that. He knew that he was selfish and childish. He couldn't show LIght the kind of love he was accustomed to seeing.

"It's a good thing I'm not my dad."

What?

"My dad is the kind of person that needs a partner like that in their life. He neglects so many aspects of his life for work and so he needs a spouse willing and able to pick up the slack. I don't need that. Work? I don't plan on being consumed by work to the detriment of everything else. So you can get as absorbed with your work as I know you like to be, just as long as I can join you sometimes. Kids? I do want kids and it looks like you already have more than enough money to support them, so that's a common source of stress out of the way.

"Besides, it's better that I take care of any kids we have, anyway. You'd probably be a disaster with that, really. I'm the one with the stronger parental instincts between the two of us. Our relationship? It'll have to be different from our parents, but that would have to be true either way. We're not them. If anything, with your nature, I'd probably have to drag you out of the house rather than wonder when I'd get to see you again." Light threw his head back and laughed.

L was struck then by how much Light had thought about this. It was becoming difficult to tell himself that Light was idealizing things when he proceeded to read him this disconcertingly well. Light's talk of children, as well, was new…

How could Light possibly be considering building a life with him? The vast majority of people found L intolerable even in short interactions. And here Light was, envisioning child-rearing and potential marriage with him. Exactly what kind of freak of nature was Light?

"Doesn't my lack of reciprocation bother you?" Because surely it must. The only reason why the subject of someone's affection not displaying affection back wouldn't hurt was if they didn't really love the person. He had accepted that Light loved him, baffling as it was, so was Light hiding his disappointment in L? Was he masking the hurt he felt that L wasn't showing him the same care that he showed him?

"But you *do* reciprocate. Your way of doing it is just different." Light disagreed.

"I…don't understand. In what ways have I reciprocated your feelings?" L questioned him. Because for all that L was attempting to do so, he felt as if he were failing.

Light considered for a moment how to phrase it in a way someone else would understand. "You don't show consideration for a lot of people, so when you show some for me, it means a lot. You're right, you're not particularly prone to large, dramatic displays of affection or declaring your undying love for me every second of the day. That isn't your style at all." Light's lips quirked up into a wry smile. "You hold your cards much closer to your chest. But it's okay, I don't dislike that you're more aloof."

L spoke the next words more quietly than he'd actually intended. "Even though you seem to be drawn to those who show affection for you openly, such as Misora and Matsuda?"

Light blinked at him with clear surprise. “I…oh.” Then the smile was back. “I really like Touta and Naomi, that’s true. They’re good friends and good people. But a person’s taste in friends isn’t the same as their taste in a partner. What can I say? I have a type and it’s pretty narrow because I’ve only ever loved one person in my entire life.”

L somehow knew who Light was referring to. “You’re still young, there’s plenty of time to fall in love with other people.”

“Not as young as I look.” Light laughed, clearly referring to his relative maturity.

L didn’t have it in him to argue the point further, a rarity for him. It wasn’t as if he liked the idea of Light abandoning him for someone else, but he felt certain that even if Light loved him now, he would grow past him eventually and then L would be left alone. Again. It was better that Light did so earlier than later, for the both of them.

Surely they could never have worked anyway, given who they both were. Their story could only end one way.

“You know,” Light looked at him thoughtfully, but his eyes had a slight tinge of that faraway look again. “It feels like you’re very worried about only being able to show me selfish love, but I don’t think you know what that really is. It’s okay, though, because I do and I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

“I’d appreciate if you explained that statement, Light.” L perpetually lived in the realm of confusing.

“It’s just that I think truly selfish affection can easily get so much worse than you’re imagining. I doubt you’d really get *that* bad.” Light gave him a wry smile.

L considered it and ultimately conceded the point. He recalled several of his previous cases to that effect. “If you’re referring to those who kill their romantic partners due to jealousy, then you’re right. I wouldn’t do that.” L *had* killed people before and had seen far more die, but he’d only ever killed in the course of an investigation. He would never so much as consider killing someone for so little a reason as jealousy or anger.

“Good to hear.” Light gave a faint smile. “But selfish love can do worse than kill.”

L struggled to think of what that would be immediately. “You’re speaking about abuse. Would you consider that to be love?”

“I suppose I am.” Light said in a distant voice with an airy quality. “And I wouldn’t, but the abuser would probably consider it love.”

Something about Light’s tone of voice made L hesitate to speak. He sounded melancholic and pained, as well as perhaps something else that L couldn’t quite detect. He sounded altogether too involved in the conversation for something purely hypothetical.

“Truly selfish love,” Light started, not noticing how disconcerted L had become. “Is corrosive. It eats away at the recipient for the benefit of the ‘giver’. It pretends to be selfless and blames the victim for being miserable.”

“I…” L was once again at a loss of what to say. Was there a correct response to give to that? “I don’t understand?” If he hadn’t been so confused and unsettled, the admittance of not knowing something would’ve burned his tongue like acid.

“You’re a manipulative liar - *I* would know - but you aren’t *evil* . You wouldn’t…well, for example, you wouldn’t threaten to hurt people if you saw your lover near them. Selfish lovers are incredibly controlling and possessive and they don’t really listen to the person they’re with. If I was really with someone like that, they’d do things like show up at my home or on my campus without permission, even if I asked them to stay away.

“They’d force affection and physical intimacy on me even when I signal that I don’t like it. They’d disrespect my boundaries constantly…invading my personal space…going into my house or bedroom without my knowledge…going through my things…” Light sighed and it sounded so *tired* to L’s ears. Exhausted. L listened, transfixed by the narrative.

“They’d want to know where I was at all times and try to force themself into every activity I did. As if all that wasn’t bad enough, they’d try to guilt-trip me any time I try to reject them or tell them I don’t like something they’re doing. Abusive and controlling partners make a show of being loving but it’s all shallow. They don’t really care about what their partner wants or even what they *need* . From beginning to end, their love is a selfish game that will only ever allow for one winner. They’re concerned with their own self-gratification, never anything else, no matter what they say.”

Light gave a humorless laugh. “The greatest magic trick I’ve ever seen is how abusers convince themselves that this is what love is supposed to look like.”

It was during Light’s dissertation that L became convinced of something. As thoughtful as Light always appeared to be, what he’d said was far too detailed and much too personal for the voice behind it to be anything else other than experience.

L had seen nothing to indicate Light had ever had a significant romantic partner before or anything close to it, but he was now forced

to regard that information as incorrect. Light had clearly had a boyfriend before or, more likely, a stalker who aspired to be so. Light's words made it clear that he had nothing but disgust for this person.

In fact, it sounded like the person had forced Light to date them through threats and coercion, which might contribute to explaining why no one knew about it. It was only when he registered a shock of pain going up his thigh that he realized how hard he'd been digging his fingers into his legs without his knowledge. He couldn't remember when he'd tightened his grip that much. It was as he stared perplexed at the crescent shaped marks he'd made in his flesh that the foul, curdling feeling in his chest was also brought to his attention.

It was the same feeling that thinking about that idiot Matsuda brought him, but stronger. L despised that feeling and though he didn't understand why it plagued him around Light when Light himself was pleasant to be around, he could at least identify why he was feeling it this time. He was angry that someone would've treated Light that way. No, he was furious. He wanted to find the person and--Light's voice cut through his troubling thoughts.

"L, are you okay? Are you listening?"

L glanced up at Light's glowing golden eyes. "Of course, Light. I was merely thinking your words over."

A second passed and then Light's eyes cleared, his lips falling into a placid smile. "Right. You always listen to me." He said, appreciation clear in his voice. And for some reason, L felt proud at that comment. He wanted to rub it in the face of this unknown person who had made Light feel ignored and isolated. L had seen many severe cases in the past, but this was different.

Light made it different.

L could at least take some consolation in knowing that this guy was no longer in Light's life. Because he knew for damn sure that he wasn't. L might have missed that information owing to it being a well-kept secret, but the chances that no one noticed it if it were still going on was practically nonexistent. Still, L didn't know what to do or say in a situation like this and he didn't appreciate feeling at a loss.

And then L caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye. Light's right arm was gripping his left tightly, nails digging in even more severely than L's had done. L easily recognized the stress response. Light was likely experiencing more severe negative emotions than he wanted to let on.

In a moment of action without conscious thought, L reached forward and grabbed Light's right wrist, drawing his clawing arm away before it could do any damage. This act caused Light to look back at him with wide and surprised eyes.

The two men sat there staring at each other in equal surprise, L holding Light's wrist. L had never been the sort to initiate physical contact very easily, so Light could hardly be more surprised than L himself was. Becoming embarrassed at his actions the longer they sat like that, L awkwardly released Light's wrist.

"It's inadvisable to harm yourself." L settled on saying. "If you need something to fuss with, I can get you a stress ball of some sort."

A second passed by and then Light's lips twisted into a small, warm smile. "Thanks."

In an attempt to mask his discomfort, L asked, "Is there anything you

want to do today? You've been more focused on the investigation lately than half the investigation team."

~ ❶ ~

The moment L made the offer, Light knew exactly what he wanted. Another date to replace the one that'd been interrupted before, but specifically…

"I'd like the two of us to go out shopping together!" Light made sure to give him a bright smile.

"You want to go out…shopping…together..?" L drew the request out like Light was asking for the strangest thing on the planet instead of something perfectly normal.

"That's right!" Light chirped, really laying on the excitement. "I've been thinking about grabbing some stuff for Near for a while now. He's been using toys to play out ideas about the investigation lately and I think it would be a double win if I went out and got him some new ones. I can do something nice for him and help the investigation since he uses them to think. *And* we'll get to spend time together. Besides, you two knew each other before the investigation, so you probably know more about him, right?"

L looked at him deadpan and Light knew with the power of experience that L was wondering if this was a trap to draw him out into the open, away from the investigation, to…kidnap him? L couldn't possibly still think Light wanted him dead, so it's the only real thing he could suspect from that line of thought.

"You want to buy a gift for N?" L eventually responded, nonplussed.

“Mhmm.” Light hummed, nodding.

“...if this is an attempt at bribing the new investigator, I feel the need to inform you that it won’t work.”

“You know it’s not.” Light waved off. After all, he hadn’t attempted to hide his affection for Near, so it shouldn’t come as a shock that he wanted to buy something for him. “Besides, even if it’s bribery, if it isn’t going to work, then what’s the harm?”

L dropped silent for a moment. “And you want me to go with you? You realize that we no longer have to stay together for everything.”

“But we can still do it if we want to.” Light gave a bright smile, echoing Near’s advice. “It can be a second date! And before you try to suggest I’m using this to draw you into a trap, I’ve already made how I feel clear and you *know* it. At worst, you can expect Annie Wilkes rather than Hannibal Lecter.” Light made sure to laugh after that so he didn’t risk L actually taking that statement seriously.

L blinked slowly. “Just because I knew N from earlier on,” At least L wasn’t trying to deny that he stacked the deck in his favor when the other investigators insisted he bring someone else on to take over the investigation while he was under suspicion. “Doesn’t mean I know his interests that well and regardless, I am certain that N is capable of buying anything he might need.” He tried.

“Gifts aren’t about getting things you can’t afford, although maybe they are for children.” Light gave a wry smile. “They’re about making someone else feel good with something you put thought into for them.” L gave him an especially blank look at his assertion. “Uh, L, you’ve gotten a gift before, right?” No response. “ *Right?* ”

"...I always had the means to buy whatever I required."

Light was going to kill Watari. He didn't know exactly what his relationship with L was, but he did know that L saw him as something of a father figure. So how dare the man never give a gift to L?

Actually, now that Light was thinking about it, could it be partially Watari's fault that L thought he was incapable of loving people? Light *knew* that wasn't true and not because of what eh thought they'd had between them in the past. Because when Rem killed Watari in his previous life, L had looked genuinely upset and concerned in the moments before his own death.

Once, Light had thought that Watari was just L's loyal servant, but moments like that made Light second guess that assumption in hindsight because L had shown care for the man in his final moments…and L didn't usually care about anyone.

But it seemed like that care didn't go both ways. That thought infuriated Light. More than anything, that made Light want to know more about L's childhood and his life. He knew so little about L outside of the Kira Case and that fact had never bothered him more than it did in that moment. If he wanted to find out more though, it couldn't be from L. He'd spent over a year with L between his two loves and he didn't even know if the man had siblings. L wouldn't share anything with him willingly.

Light *did* have a strong suspicion that L was from somewhere English-speaking. L didn't have a notable accent - be it Japanese or otherwise - but Light was willing to bet that was intentional, more than anything. L was incredibly obsessed with security and secrecy so if he'd had an accent in the past, he'd probably weeded it out when he became a detective. Whenever that was.

The reason Light suspected somewhere English-speaking had to do more with L's pronunciation of Japanese and the emphasis he put on certain sounds. His pronunciation was never bad or *wrong* , per se, but it was different in a very particular way. He'd heard many people who had English as a first language pronounce things differently to a native Japanese speaker like himself but similarly to other English speakers.

It seemed to have less to do with knowledge of the language and more to do with habitual speech patterns based on the most common sounds in their native language that they're unconsciously carrying over to their target language. It was the same thing with emphasizing certain sounds when they speak. And because English has consonants that Japanese doesn't, it often seemed like English speakers were partially pronouncing consonants when speaking Japanese that weren't actually there. Ah, the joys of phonetics.

Besides that, Light had nothing to go on for L's past. He could look up L's name - the one he could see above his head - but would that even pull up anything? L was absolutely intelligent and skilled enough to remove any and all mentions of his true name. And if L found out that Light knew his real name, who knew what he would do? He'd had Misa kidnapped for the same threat, after all.

Light had spent some time talking to Near and he hoped they were getting closer, but he doubted Near would be forthcoming with whatever he knew about L, either. *If* he did know something. Just because it was clear they'd had some previous acquaintance - and that Near was L's successor - didn't mean he knew any more about L's personal life than the rest of them did. Almost as soon as the idea of getting the information from Near was discarded, a new one popped into his head.

There was…always the possibility that he could get the information from Mello. Or rather, the kid being called Mello. He was darker and more emotional than the other two on top of being a child. Since he wasn't L's successor, he wasn't sure how much he could expect from

the boy's knowledge. However, out of the three - four if he counted the other boy with him - he would probably be the easiest to tease information out of. Then again, his friend had been the most honest one out of the two since he didn't believe Light was Kira, now that he thought about it. Maybe he should aim for that one. Oh well, he'd probably find them together anyway.

Of course, that plan brought with it the uncomfortable certainty that he would have to seek out Mello again and tolerate his presence to get what he wanted. Light didn't really want to spend any more time around the child version of his enemy, but he might be in a situation where he stood to gain more if he did. He was probably still in Japan, right? L wouldn't have sent him away right after finding out about him breaking into Light's house, right? Maybe it was a moot point.

Light knew that this version of Mello hadn't done anything to Sayu yet - the two had actually got along when they met - and he couldn't avoid the fact that Mello was a child at the moment, but even so…he didn't like him and he didn't like being around him. Mello was still the person who would grow up and take over an organized crime syndicate *and* kidnap his sister, scarring her for life, *and* kill his dad. It was difficult to push down the disgust and distrust when he was around the kid. He just really didn't like the brat.

But if he could get something out of it, he'd figure out how to track the kid down. He didn't realize that it wouldn't be necessary.

~ ❶ ~

The very next day, the two went to the mall.

Light was glowing with pride that L agreed to go out shopping with him. After all, L wouldn't have even contemplated going out if he really hated the idea, especially since he was a borderline hermit most

of the time. He could feel L *trying* and it made him very happy.

Light was making it his mission to get L out of his hotel-shell a little bit, especially since there was no reason for him to hide this time. No one knew what L, the detective, looked like and there wasn't anyone else who could kill him by seeing his face anymore.

True to his word, as Light shopped, he thought about the toys Near was using and which ones he might need. As Light was reaching for one of the dolls on the shelf, his mind drifted off. He'd spent a lot of time watching Near as Chronos. Toys represented how Near thought of the people involved in the investigation and he had them act through the things he imagined them doing, so the dolls will probably change as time goes on.

He also prefers smaller ones to bigger things like teddy bears. So he should grab a variety of smaller ones so Near has a lot to work with. Light grabs a few random things like a construction worker and a gorilla. He smirked to himself when he found a safari toy set that had a cage as part of it, that was perfect. Light paused when he caught sight of two finger puppets; an angel and a devil. Light gave a wry, humorless smile as he looked at them, imagining which would represent who between him and L if Near used them.

Still, these toys were for Near, he reminded himself as he grabbed both of them and put them in the shopping basket after only a short pause. Then Light saw a T-Rex toy. He was going to pass on that at first, since he didn't see how it could be used as a stand-in for this investigation, but he caught himself.

Near was just a kid. He didn't like that he'd been roped into this investigation and who knows how many others at this age, but he was still a kid. Why did every single toy he got have to be used only to help catch Kira? He deserved some toys that were just fun to play with without there having to be a purpose to it. Light quickly grabbed the - frankly huge - dinosaur toy.

L had watched him sort through the toys in the store but it was clear he had no idea what Light was thinking as he chose and discarded toys.

"It looks like you're nesting." L commented all of a sudden, making Light choke out a strangled laugh in surprise.

"It's not as if Near's my child." He defended.

"I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference, just by watching you." L's lips tilted up in the smallest smirk.

Light gave a mock shriek at that. "I'm just buying some toys! Here, make yourself useful and carry these up front." He said, shoving the basket into L's hands.

After a look of surprise, L did turn to take the basket to the counter, but Light was pretty sure he heard the man mutter under his breath, "Reduced to a personal shopper…"

Light smiled and trailed after him.

In the middle of their checkout, L's phone started ringing and he rooted through his pockets for a hot second before pulling it out and answering it. "Ah, hello?" L listened for a bit and then turned to Light. "Sorry, Light, it's a call about something having to do with the case. I'm going to go into the back of the store to get some privacy, I'll be back in a few minutes."

“Alright, I’ll just wait here, then.” Light waved him off, fighting down his curiosity. He’d left Ryuk at the hotel that day so he and L could have some privacy. He’d find out what it was about later.

The cashier finished packing their bags quickly. “Is it okay if I put these off to the side on the counter and leave them here until my companion comes back?”

“That’s fine.” The cashier agreed and after giving them a smile, he wandered off a little bit to look at some of the racks near the cash register. He made sure to stay close enough that he could be seen from the register when L came back.

He was only at it for a minute, venturing a little further away from the register in the process, when someone spoke to him from behind.

“Alright, I’m ready.” Light turned around to face the familiar voice, but against his expectations, the person behind him wasn’t L. He certainly *looked* like L, but things were slightly off. Like someone doing their best to mimic the man he loved.

And above his head hovered the words *Beyond Birthday*.

Chapter End Notes

> I’m almost certainly going to go back at some point in the future because I feel like the shopping trip should be longer before Beyond shows up but I can’t, for the life of me, think up a way to naturally extend the scene or add in more.
>
> Btw: Something crazy in four chapters…

A Little Talk

Chapter Summary

B just wants to talk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Oh, hello, B . Light thought half in shock as he registered the person standing in front of him.

Because who else could this be? It was the L look-alike.

L and his army of child detectives with questionable backgrounds were discussing someone named B or so Ryuk had told him. The fact that this overheard discussion was triggered by what Light had told him about the unknown individual skulking around the police station, this could only be one person. Now that he looked at the guy's actual name, referring to him as "B" seemed quite obvious, but at least it wasn't as on the nose as L's own name was.

In fact, it was weird that each of those detectives went by nicknames sharing the same first letter as all of their real names. He was detecting a lack of creativity. Or maybe some nostalgia for their original names. Why else would they leave even that tenuous tie to their real identities, especially during the Kira case where that kind of information is crucial?

The more Light looked at who he assumed was B, the more specific parts of his appearance and mannerisms struck Light as just wrong and he realized just why this person's act felt so off. At any rate, Light was faced with a problem. This guy wasn't L, he simply wasn't.

Was L okay? *He must be,* Light reminded himself forcefully.

He vaguely remembered the fight he and L had when Light had lost his memories of being Kira. He wasn't sure about how far it went but he knew one thing and that was that L had enough fighting skill to make it difficult for anyone attacking him. Everyone in the store would've heard the fight. So that either meant that this "B" got the drop on L by getting behind him - Light severely doubted that was even possible given L's cautious nature - or he chose this moment to approach Light because L was distracted.

EIther way, how did he handle this?

The guy was clearly trying to look like L and now that Light thought about it, the guy said he was ready a second ago, as in "ready to leave together". This made three things clear to Light:

1) He was absolutely trying to convince Light that he was L for some reason. It was one thing to look like someone - even with intention behind it - but it was another thing entirely to approach someone they were with and try to continue their earlier conversation.

2) He'd been listening in on said conversation or at least watching them enough to know that L stepped away for something and Light was waiting for him. He knew enough to act like he'd just come back from doing something when he approached Light for the first time.

3) He wanted to get Light alone. Even if Light and L had been about to leave, the fact that the first thing B said to him upon approach was that he was ready to leave implied what he really wanted was to get Light out of the store as soon as possible. Further away from L or just away from any witnesses like the cashier and other shoppers..? And to do what? It was never a good thing when someone pretended to be someone you knew and tried to get you to leave a public area.

Knowing all this, what was the better option? He couldn't afford to take too long to decide.

Attempting to buy himself some time and hoping to get some additional information to work with, Light put on a smile and asked, “Good to see you’re back. What was the phone call about?”

“Nothing important, I assure you. We can be on our way now, I’ll get our bags.” B said.

The more he looked at him and the more they talked, it just made his skin itch all the more with just how not like L this imposter was. All the little things that were just *wrong* that were piling up. Whatever the case, Light couldn’t just simply leave with him.

Not only would it be dangerous to go anywhere alone with this guy without his Death Note or Ryuk, but he didn’t want to imagine L’s reaction if he saw Light with B and thought they were planning something together. It would complicate their already complicated relationship and ruin all the work Light had done to soften L up! And what if his real plan wasn’t to distract L and approach Light, but to distract Light so someone else could approach L?

Ryuk had said that the way L’s group had talked about B sounded like an antagonistic relationship so while Light might’ve considered that B and L were working together and this was all a setup in different circumstances, right now, he was far more concerned about L being more vulnerable without Light by his side. If that was the plan, then he couldn’t leave..! He had to put B off, but could he do that while still playing along to the act? It was proving difficult with how B was pressuring for them to go.

That was his best indication that L was okay. Why would he be so intent on them leaving soon if he wasn't worried that L could end his phone call at any moment and return to see them and ruin whatever plan B had?

"Are you sure?" Light said, trying to fish for information. "The call sounded pretty serious when you answered it. I think it'd be a good idea if you call Watari and have him pick us up in front of the store. We'll deal with whatever it is and head back." There was absolutely no way that B would want Watari to see him. He's probably one of the only people besides L who would recognize B wasn't him. However, Light's suggestion sounded perfectly reasonable and plausible on the surface.

Light strongly suspected he wasn't imagining the slight hint of irritation when B responded, "I assure you, it can wait. We shouldn't end our shopping trip so soon. There's no need to call…Watari. Is it that you don't want to leave the store yet? Something else you'd like to buy, perhaps?"

"Actually yes," Light said, adapting. "While I was waiting, I thought of something else I'd like to buy–"

"Well, we can always get it next time." B actually cut him off, something L never did. "I'm sure what you already got is enough for now." *B must really want to go,* Light thought. *It's starting to make cracks in his act. L is never this forceful.*

"It'll only take a minute. Especially if the phone call wasn't serious. I'll just…" Light turned on his heel and made to move further into the store. B was clearly pushing to get Light to leave the store as soon as possible, so much so that it would be suspicious even if Light didn't already know he wasn't L. If that was the case, Light could screw him over easily by just refusing to leave and he didn't need to let on that he knew.

That route was dashed a second later when he felt a strong hand grip his and turn him around. B physically stopped him from moving away by grabbing his hand and if that wasn't an escalation of the situation, Light didn't know what was. B peered at him darkly for just a second before blinking it away.

Lips still in a contemplative pout, he leaned closer to Light's face while keeping hold of his hand. “Actually, the truth is…I just want to spend some *alone time together.”* Light could admit that B keeping his face impassive while dropping his voice to that low purr *was* impressive. Impressive but still uncomfortable.

B continued. “How about we get out of here~” B started trailing his other hand up Light's other arm, fingertips barely brushing his skin and leaving goosebumps in their wake. A disgusted shiver went up his spine. It made something deep inside Light feel the urge to vomit as if he'd spent weeks at sea.

Okay, I can't do this! Light realized at the same time as he wrenched his arm away and finally allowed himself to glare at B in open hostility. Maybe once upon a time, he could pretend to love someone for his own gain, but he’s grown past that. Now, the thought of being with anyone besides L, and hurting L in the process, made him sick to his stomach.

“Alright, I’m tired of this! Who the heck are you?” Light demanded, trying not to sound as bothered as he was. He wasn’t getting anything this way, anyway, and going *anywhere* with him was too high risk for too little reward.

The counterfeit L jerked at Light’s question and looked at him with a hard look flashing through his eyes. Then it was gone a second later. “What are you talking about? It’s me, Ryuzaki.”

“Uh huh.” Light deadpanned, his nausea subsiding. “You realize I’m not buying that, right? You sounded like you really wanted to get me to leave quickly a moment ago. Do you really have the time to waste playing a losing game?”

As Light expected, that had been the quickest way to get B to drop the act. The hard look in his eyes returned and intensified. It looked like this person - whoever he was - couldn’t quite get a measure of him but really wanted to. Then the guy suddenly gave an easygoing smile that was completely at odds with L’s usual smile and his posture righted itself just a little. “Yeah, alright, I get it. You don’t buy me as L, but that usually works, you know.”

His voice still sounded like L’s as he spoke, but his way of speaking and inflection changed. It was like the layers he’d put on to make his voice sound different slowly faded away. It was eerie.

“Does it, now?” Light commented, raking his eyes up and down this man - B’s - frame, making sure to look unimpressed. “Can’t see why.” He was unusually miffed by the farce, actually. He didn’t like that someone was pretending to be L or that they tried to trick him. And he especially didn’t like not knowing what this guy’s plan here was.

If anything, his response and his unimpressed mien made B’s smile grow larger, making the comparison between him and L even more tenuous. “Really, it does. Few have been able to do that before. Be able to tell I’m not L, I mean. And so quickly, too.” Rather than being annoyed as Light was, he seemed pleased with Light’s existence.

Then B gave an elaborate bow. “I’m afraid I can’t give you my real name. You may call me B or BB, if you prefer.” Light kept the unimpressed look. B kept the smile. “I’d be *very* interested to know how you knew I wasn’t L.” His smile gained a predatory edge to it.

Light scoffed.

"What?" B gestured to himself, incredulously. "I thought my impression was pretty perfect!"

"You looked like a fan dressing up like an anime character." Light scoffed again, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, come on, it couldn't have been that bad!" B objected, affronted.

Light sucked in a breath. "You weren't hunched over enough, your skin tone is slightly off and looks too clammy, L acts more laid-back than you were, the circles around your eyes are clearly eyeshadow, you spoke a little too fast, your eyes showed emotion too clearly, and you're wearing socks."

At that last part, they both glanced down at B's shoes and the gym socks slightly poking out of them. "Seriously?" B looked at him in disbelief. "You had an itemized list of differences in your head? I even went through the trouble of getting the exact brand, style, and color of shoe that L was wearing today and that doesn't matter because of the *socks?* "

Light shrugged. "He doesn't like wearing socks."

B stared at him for a few seconds. "And all that other stuff…you know him more than I thought you did."

Just to rub it in, Light added, "Also, when I call L by an alias, I don't

use Ryuzaki unlike the rest of the team. I call him Hideki."

This seemed to be the last straw. "I thought I'd made a study of memorizing him, but you're a pro!" B threw his head back to cackle, a sound that made Light cringe. He didn't like seeing a face that looked even remotely like L's twist that way.

"And here I thought," B said between bouts of laughter. "How strange it was that L would've chosen a younger man and a pretty boy, at that. Knowing him, I should've figured there was more to you than your pretty face." The L look-alike continued to huff in laughter, to Light's rising annoyance.

"Well, at least one of your faces is pretty." B amended.

That made Light pause. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Just that, every now and then, you look like a character from a horror movie." B said with a toothy smile.

Light stiffened, almost like he'd been electrocuted. "I don't know what you're talking about." He responded stiffly to B's accusation. Because when in doubt, deny everything.

"Oh, I'm sure." B smirked with visible contempt. Light bristled. "Do you recognize this?" B reached into his pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper which he carefully unfolded and held up for Light to see.

He did, in fact, recognize it. It was clearly a page torn from a notebook that had been shredded into dozens of pieces and - by the look of it - sometime afterward meticulously taped back together. It

didn't produce the most legible writing, but it was still easy to distinguish the words "Lind L. Tailor" on the page. If B had even a single other sample of his handwriting, he probably knew who had written it.

Light stared at the paper expressionlessly for a handful of seconds before looking back to B. "If this is an attempt at blackmail, I'm not going to play your game."

"Come on, why so tense? Why don't we talk for a while? I think there's information that we both have that the other would find quite *enlightening* ." B gave a sharp grin. "There are things I want and I'm committed to getting them in any way necessary."

"Is that a threat?" Light raised an eyebrow mockingly at him.

"Of course not." B said with a much too big smile. "It wouldn't be very smart to threaten someone who can kill with supernatural powers, after all. But maybe we can trade information for information, hm? You have answers to my many questions and I can tell you things about L, M and N." Light had been about to scoff and tell him to go shove it, but at that last part, he went still.

It was true that Light wanted to know more about the man he loved, but it was more true that he recognized he was at an informational disadvantage here. B wasn't someone he'd ever had to deal with in his first life and there was a secret history here with all of them that he desperately needed to know.

"Knowledge is power" is one of the truest statements Light had ever heard in his life. A large part of why L struggled to prove his identity as Kira the first time around was because he didn't have access to a whole host of vital information about how the power of Kira worked. The reverse situation could also be coming true.

He knew nothing about L's past and now the two that led to his downfall - Near and Mello - were back and it was the latter that especially made his lack of knowledge glaring. Mixed with the meddling of B, he wasn't liking the route this was all taking. Light was reluctant to exchange information with someone who gave him such a bad feeling, but it wasn't like he would learn anything from L himself…

"There's something I want to know." It was a small thing but would help guard against B in the future and it would help Light determine how willing he was to actually part with information. "You were watching me and L at the very least since we entered this store. How did you without one of us noticing you?"

B gave a small huff of amusement. "By being at a distance myself, of course. It's not a small shop but there are certainly better methods to use to keep an eye on someone that blend in more with the surroundings."

Light opened his mouth to ask what that was but before he could, B reached into one of his pockets and pulled out a small remote control. Waving it back and forth playfully, he pressed a button and Light heard the whirring sound of something small approaching them.

He turned to see a small RC car approaching them from between the rows of toys and stopping by his feet. Light had to look at it for a second but he saw the telltale dome on the top of the toy. It was a remote control toy car with a camera on top.

Light almost wanted to burst out laughing at the sight. That would definitely do it. He and L wouldn't have conceived that they were being spied on by a toy car, if they even noticed it in a *toy shop* .

“Like I said,” B stated casually, bending down to place the remote on top of the toy car. “I didn't need to get close to keep an eye on you two. So, what about my proposal?” B turned back to him. When Light didn’t respond, B baited him more. “Don’t you want to know about Wammy’s House?”

“Wammy’s what now?” Light jerked.

“It’s the place we all grew up in. Near, myself…and L. Wouldn’t you like to know more about it and what we learned there?”

Regardless, Light was both curious about this mysterious place that had never come up before and…intensely concerned. B was setting off all of his flags even though all he was doing was claiming that he, L and Near all grew up in the same place. Light mentally added Matt and Mello tentatively to that list, as well. This mysterious place called Wammy’s House that raised and taught children…what? Light had a sneaking suspicion.

It’d been made obvious to Light by watching how L reacted that he knew what was going on and the way he talked about B to Near, Mello, and Matt that they all knew who he was. That knowledge heavily reduced the chance that B was lying to him about what he knew, but that didn’t mean Light could just turn around and trust everything he claimed.

More than that, the idea that they might’ve grown up together made it even worse that he was apparently willing to betray them all for… what exactly? Of course, B could also be trying to help them and this was all one big manipulation. Light found he might actually prefer that, considering the alternative was that B meant L and those kids real harm.

It was all of these unknowns that made Light consider playing B’s

game. Still, even if this was his only opportunity to find out information on someone who was clearly important, he wasn't convinced spending any amount of time with this person was a good idea. B seemed to be more of the "keep your distance from him" type of person.

Apparently he was taking too long for B's taste.

"You know, how about I tell L that you don't have a lifespan?" B asked, a deceptively kind smile on his face.

Light stiffened. "What?" How could this guy possibly know about that? How did he even know about lifespans?

"Your lifespan. The date that people are supposed to die are written above their heads. Everyone except yours. I wonder what's wrong with you, hm? Is it perhaps that you can see people's deaths, as well? Would you like L to know about it?" B asked with rapidfire questioning.

Light thought about that. Did he want L to know about his lifespan not being there. Could he figure out that he wasn't human from that information? And if he did, would he lose his interest in him?

"Or…" B started, his voice dropping lower. "If you really don't want to talk to me now, maybe you'd like it if I found that friend of yours and asked *him* some questions?"

I swear, if he thinks about touching Touta, I'll make sure he dies of the slowest, most painful disease I can find. Light quickly donned a welcoming smile that was overtly fake and said, "Of course. Would you care to join me for lunch later?"

B mirrored him with a sharp smile of his own. “Make it lunch now and I won’t cause trouble for the both of you today. You came out here with L, correct?” It was a question but it didn’t sound like one.

Light’s smile tightened minutely. “Of course.” Light liked that threat about as much as he liked how clearly B had been watching them on their date. He didn’t have a page of the Death Note with him and Light cursed in his head as he suddenly realized how complacent he’d gotten in this life. He’d become so used to having all the answers and now he realized that if someone tried to kill or attack L right now, he wouldn’t be able to execute them. He’d have to go with B if only to make sure he didn’t do something until he could come up with a counter for it.

Light just hoped L was still dealing with his phone call and wouldn’t see Light was leaving to go somewhere with his would-be clone.

~ ❶ ~

Soon enough, Light found himself sitting down with B at a restaurant several blocks away. The way he’d beelined to the place told Light that B knew the layout of the surrounding area surprisingly well.

The two sat across from each other in a booth and after having their drink orders taken, there was a period of heavy silence as they had a little staring contest. Light wasn’t sure how he was going to play this yet. He’d probably have to roll with the punches, the way he always did when surprises were sprung on him.

“How about we play a little game?” B asked suddenly, looking completely at ease with the situation.

“What kind of game?” Light asked, guardedly.

“I know things that you’d like to know and you have information I’d find useful. We’ll each take turns asking a question and once we’re satisfied with the answer, it’ll be the other person’s turn. I’ll start~”

“What about if one of us doesn’t know the answer to the question we’re asked?” Light said.

“Then the person gets to ask another one. Of course, if one of us is found to be lying, there would have to be…consequences. It wouldn’t be a fun game if cheating was allowed, after all.” B gestured to him.

“And why do you get to go first?” Light raised an eyebrow.

B chuckled, lowly. “I’m a man who appreciates having an edge. He who strikes first–”

“–wins.” Light found himself finishing the quote before blinking in shock at what came out of his mouth. For a second, he was brought back to another time, facing off with someone else.

B also looked at him with surprise and no small amount of interest. “That’s right.” He said with a crooked smile. Light fought down the urge to shift uncomfortably. “Why do you look like that?” It didn’t take a genius to figure out what he was talking about.

“Is that your first question, then?” Light raised an eyebrow, trying to come off as less unsettled than he was.

He'd heard the spoken guidelines of their battle and now he had an unspoken set of his own to work off of. Find a way to give enough information to pacify this person in the short-term and come away with some info of his own about L and his brood, while giving away as little harmful information as possible that could be used against them.

It was at times like this that he slipped back into old habits; that he went back to when he was actually fighting L instead of playing the little game they had going on now. Because what he and B were engaging in right now wasn't a game, no matter what they called it aloud. First rule? *Never* let on to how you really feel. Don't look stressed, don't look worried, don't look angry. If someone knows what you're feeling, they can use it against you.

"Yes. Why do you look like that?" B returned.

Light thought about it. "Because I'm Kira." This time, that admission was a calculated one. He'd rather admit to that than being a god of death in the flesh and it wasn't as if B didn't already know or - at the very least - heavily suspect that to be the case. He'd shown Light the paper with Kira's most famous victim written on it in his own handwriting, after all.

And if B was recording their conversation, then he'd just have to go with it. He could acknowledge he wasn't going to get out of this conversation without sounding suspicious if not outright guilty. Not if he wanted to buy himself some time without B doing something. At worst, if B recorded the admission and sent it to L, Light could lie and say he claimed to be Kira to fool B.

B narrowed his eyes. "That isn't an answer."

Light felt a little better getting to annoy the man. "It's the truth, though." And he did consider it to be, in a distorted way.

He looked this way because he was no longer fully human at his core, and that was because he'd been given the Death Note in his first life. That was what had given him the chance to be interesting enough to the Shinigami King to be given life after death not once but twice. Therefore, he could say that the way he looked strangely now was ultimately dependent on him becoming Kira. That's the truth, albeit a heavily edited version of it. B didn't look the least bit happy with him, but Light just smiled pleasantly at him. "My question now. Why are you trying to look so much like L?"

"Because he's L." B replied snarkily, making Light's smile drop. Light looked at him with an expression that said *"really?"* B's expression didn't twitch.

Honestly, Light didn't expect it would be that easy, anyway. B wouldn't give him any more useful information than he got from Light. Of course he wouldn't. And there were things Light *needed* to know. They were all in a dangerous situation and the sooner B became a known quantity, the sooner Light could figure out his next move after this.

Gritting his teeth, Light said, "I look like this because it's what Kira's power does to people." He came up with a somewhat plausible lie on the spot. There was no way he was telling this person that he'd died twice and that's why he looked like this. Even that wasn't the full truth. As long as B didn't figure out he was lying until much later, Light could get away with a few careful lies here and there.

He didn't want to take the risk that the "consequences" for lying during their "game" would be directed at someone other than him. Like Touta or Naomi.

Looking smug, B said, "I'm trying to look like L because I want to overcome him in a way he never expected and looking like him is part

of the mockery. That, and I was raised to be like him, so…" He shrugged the rest of his sentence off.

"What do you mean you were raised to be like him?" Light jerked back. What the heck did that even mean?

"Is that your question?"

"Yes!" Later on, Light could get angry at himself for his lack of composure at such a critical time, but the claim B had just made was…

"Well, if you insist," He crooned, looking much too happy to talk about it. Enough so that Light briefly regretted asking about it before B continued. "It's the goal of the place we were all raised in. I was raised to be L's intellectual equal. Not that I ever succeeded. My turn!" B abruptly cut off the information, skillfully leaving Light hanging. "How do you kill? I must admit, being able to kill someone without being present…that sounds pretty useful."

And there was the thing Light *really* didn't want to talk about. But it made sense B would bring it up almost immediately. It would naturally be the thing that he was most curious about. Light was planning to do the same thing: prioritize the information he most wanted to have. He briefly considered telling B that he was born with the ability before discarding it.

B was clearly intelligent. He'd immediately question why the killings only started within the last year if he'd always had it and know Light was lying. Still, Light couldn't afford to inform B that he could do the same if he wrote on the page he had. The front page was all taped together, no actual paper from the note could be written on from the front, but if B *only* taped the front, then he might be able to write on the back page. Light didn't know and he couldn't risk it or B trying to

get another page from his Note, which he would if he knew the truth.

He had to come up with a believable lie that wouldn't enable B to try using the power of the Death Note against him…

"I had a near death experience." Light said, quietly.

"Excuse me?" B inquired, raising an eyebrow at him.

"I nearly died." Light covered himself in a layer of confidence and authority as he spoke. "A month before I started killing, I went to a hot spring to release some stress from school, hit my head, and nearly drowned. I thankfully survived, but sometime afterward, I realized I could kill people with the power of my mind. When I wished for people to die, they would. Just the way I wanted them to. I decided to use my newly acquired power for good."

B studied him closely for a very tense minute before snorting. "'For good', you say. So sure of yourself, are you?"

Light ignored his taunting. "My turn. What is this place you were talking about, where you were all supposedly raised? Is that the place you mentioned before? Wammy's House?"

"It sure is!" B nodded his assent. "I'm not surprised you don't know about it, considering it doesn't exist according to most of the world. Technically, it's an orphanage, but in practice…"

"In practice?" Light pressed with irritation.

B gave him a crooked smile. “In practice, it was a training ground to produce the next L. That’s what I was raised for and that’s what Near and the other children of Wammty’s House were raised for.”

Light felt a shiver go down his spine. Produce the next L? The comment shouldn’t have come as a surprise, given that B kind of hinted at it before, but both the admission and the way he said it made both L and the children sound like robots being assembled to serve a purpose. Like they were being churned out on an assembly line. It was a foul thought that Light couldn’t get rid of after it occurred to him.

In truth, Light had never given any proper thought to where L came from or where he grew up. He’d of course wondered little things like what L was like as a kid or what his family had been like, but nothing profound. He’d thought about Near and Mello’s childhoods too, but more in the sense of wondering how L got ahold of these kids and why they were involved in criminal cases this young. Thoughts like: where the fuck were their parents?!

It’s not like he’d considered that they were all orphans and they were raised together in some underground facility, like there was a huge conspiracy. Light swore that he’d had less questions when he knew nothing about their past and it was frustrating.

“I like that look on your face.” Light jerked his head to look at the other man as he spoke. “You look angry and disgusted. That’s exactly what I feel.” B leaned back smugly. “Wammy’s House is where we were all taught, but it should really be called L’s House. L is the legacy student. The one we should all emulate.” B said with clear revulsion.

Light fought to wipe the apparently disgusted expression he had clear off his face and prevented a new one from taking its place at the distaste B showed towards L. “I guess you’re not a fan of L, huh?” He said, faux casually.

B barked out a harsh laugh. “ *Not a fan?* I loathe the man. I *hate* him. He ruined all of our lives. It would make me *very* happy if he’d never existed in the first place.” He sounded the slightest bit unhinged as he spoke. Light couldn’t tell if that was a good thing or not. On the one hand, he could learn more information if the other guy lost his composure, but his danger level would rise to the same degree.

“I get that being raised to emulate someone else would’ve been very hard on you, but…” Light tried to sound empathetic. Maybe if he could manage to endear himself to B, he could find out more without incurring more risk of harm to the people he cared about.

B smacked the table. “You don’t know *anything!* You can’t even begin to conceive the–” B forcefully stopped himself there, covering his face with a hand and taking several shallow breaths. Light stiffly waited until the man pulled himself together. “Sorry about that.” B said at last in a bright tone that sounded forced. When he removed his hand, the teasing smirk was back and it was as if the rage from before had never happened. “I believe it’s my turn now. Tell me, what is Kira doing cozying up to the detective trying to catch him, huh? I first thought that you might be trying to get close to him to kill him, but…” B drew off and didn’t look like he was going to continue, so Light replied.

“I just happen to really like L.” At least this was something he could admit to easily enough. From the way B was acting earlier, he’d already guessed the nature of their current relationship, so he lost nothing by just admitting to it, albeit in a more toned down nature.

“Yeah, I could guess as much by the way you hang off him.” B rolled his eyes.

Light pricked with annoyance but he refused to show it. “I wasn’t hanging off of him today. We barely held hands.”

“The significance of which cannot be overstated.” B gave him a sharp smile. “I can imagine what you do behind closed doors. Still, you must have a great deal of confidence in yourself to risk crawling into bed with the enemy.”

Light ignored the allusions to his and L’s sex life - or the lack thereof. “My question. Why do you hate L so much?” Light asked.

“You’re bad at this game, I already answered that.” B laughed. The waitress came back with their drinks and asked if they wanted any food, but B waved her off.

“No, you started but didn’t finish.” Light corrected him. “You said he ruined your life, but not *how* he ruined it. It has to do with being raised following his standard, doesn’t it? I don’t see how that’s his fault, though.” The most important thing to Light was determining how much of a danger this guy was to L and the kids. Getting as much information on his thought process as he could would also help Light figure out what he planned to do in the future.

“Haaah,” B leaned back. “Fine, but in return, I’m not going to hold back on my next question. I’ll have you know that your *lover boy’s* training made my friend kill himself. My friend *committed suicide* because we were all meant to be successor’s to L’s ‘greatness’. The grueling training, the isolation, the endless psychological taxation…he couldn’t find any meaning in life. It’s all L’s fault.” B was gripping his glass so tightly that Light was distantly worried it might break, but his tone of voice was almost devoid of emotion.

Light felt vaguely ill and he struggled to maintain his poker face. He would need to think over what he’d just heard later. He didn’t have time to process right now. Not if he was going to keep up with B and not lose their information battle. In the moment, he had to protect his interests so he couldn’t dwell on it too hard. “But L would have been

too young at the time to do any of that."

"He was doing much more at a much younger age." B replied, vaguely. "But you are right. When my friend and I were being raised in his image, it was at the behest of the adults running the orphanage. L wouldn't take an active interest in what was going on there until later, even if he knew what was happening well before that. Either way, his existence caused it all. My turn again." B said.

His next question couldn't be that bad, right?

"Can you see people's names and dates of death above their heads?"

Crap.

"Why do you ask?" Light tried to sound curious rather than anything else.

"You realize I'm not going to let you avoid this after the answer I just gave to your question, right?" B looked him up and down.

"I'm not trying that, I just want to know why you ask." Light tried to sound casual.

"Then that can be your question after you answer me." B returned.

Light gave an internal sigh and braced himself for the answer he knew he had to give. Somehow, he was absolutely sure that B would know if he lied about this one. "Yes, I can." He could see B's.

“Hm.” It was just a hum but it sounded very pleased.

“Mine.” Light’s throat felt dry. The delay had given him time to think about how he wanted to word his next question. “What indicated to you that I could?”

B smiled with far too many teeth showing. “Like I said, I can see your…hm…less desirable side? Sometimes you look like a monster and when you do, that monster has red eyes. I know a thing or two about red eyes. I know those eyes let you see someone’s name and lifespan when you see someone’s face.”

And suddenly something clicked for Light. “Because you have them too.” His references to lifespans and names hovering above people’s heads now made sense. He couldn’t figure out how B would know anything about those otherwise. Touching a page of his Note would explain how he saw Light’s Shinigami form, but wouldn’t explain *that* . He still couldn’t fathom how B had the eyes or why his eyes weren’t red - at least to Light’s sight - but it was the most likely explanation.

“That’s not a question and it’s not your turn.” B said. Despite saying that, he looked and sounded absolutely delighted by Light’s deduction. As if he were ecstatic for it to be known.

“Not quite sure how your kills work yet, but it’s strange of you to limit yourself to not killing people whose names and photos weren’t released to the public or whose names were misspelled. It’ll be fun to find out how much of those limitations - if any - are real, but the names being misspelled or not released are lies, at least. I can see someone’s name even looking at a photo, so I know you can too. I don’t need to ask about that now, though, it’ll be more fun to find that out myself. Instead, my next question is: what is your goal in all of this?” B tilted his head in interest.

“I doubt my goals could be of much interest to you.” Light scoffed. He doubted B would enjoy hearing how he wasn’t after world domination this time.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that~” B crooned. “Who knows? We might be able to find common ground. Be able to work together.”

*I **highly** doubt that,* Light thought. “There’s something I want to achieve, but I assure you it’s nothing complex and nothing I need help with. You’ll have to forgive me if I don’t want to part with the specifics of what that is, but you can probably guess with what you observed from my actions as Kira.” B could guess but it would probably be inaccurate.

It would be easy to see his executions of criminals and think that he was hoping to cleanse the world like he had in his first life, but his real goal now was just to help out as many people as possible and make things right with the people he’d taken for granted back then. He didn’t know B very well, but he doubted someone like him would consider the people Light loved as his real goal.

“How long have you had the eyes?” Light considered asking B how he got them, but decided that asking about the timeframe would be more direct. If he asked how it happened, B could go with something more vague like Light had done.

“As far as I know, I was born with them. Could never find a thing to explain why my sight is like this,” B propped his chin up on his fist as he gazed at Light. “But I suspect that’s changed now.”

Light couldn’t believe what B had just told him. He’d never heard of someone being born with the eyes of a Shinigami in any of his lives. It

just didn't happen…except apparently it did. He would need to investigate that immediately.

"Speaking of," B huffed a laugh. "Did your *eyes* come with your change from gaining powers? I can't help but wonder why I didn't get them even though I have the same eyes."

Did B suspect he was lying about how he got the power to kill? Light couldn't be sure, but he would have to be careful about how he answered, regardless. "I started seeing people's names and death dates shortly before I started killing for the first time." The key was to sound like he was giving away a decent amount of useful information while keeping it short, so there was less chance there'd be a contradiction somewhere in his story.

"So you weren't born with them, huh…" B looked at him thoughtfully.

Light shook his head. "No, I wasn't. It's my turn. Let's go back to goals. What's yours? You hate L, but why are you here? If you're hoping to convince me to kill L, he's my--" *Love.* "--rival."

He wasn't sure how much B suspected about how deep his feelings were for L, but if he thought Light might turn on L with the right motivation even if he liked him…well, that would probably be more beneficial than the alternative. He might be more willing to tell Light about his plans than if he knew that no power on Earth would get him to allow L to come to any harm.

"On the contrary." B drew Light out of his thoughts. "I don't want him dead yet. I can't beat him if he's dead. No. Before, I wanted to create a case. A case that even the great L wouldn't be able to solve." B said, wistfully. "But that attempt failed, so I'm going to try something a little different this time. If I feel like it, you might find out what that

is, in time."

Light wanted to demand an actual answer, if for no other reason than so he could prepare accordingly. But he could hardly do that when he'd been vague about his own goals, which is probably part of the reason B did it. He did have some curiosity about B's previous - apparently failed - plan, though.

"You tried to create a case that L couldn't solve? What good would that have done you?" Light asked, nonplussed.

"It would've spat on his name!" B said. "His perfect reputation is everything to him. 'L, the Great Detective.' 'He's never lost a case.' I wanted to make a case he could never solve and it would not only be the only blotch on his perfect record, it would also prey on his mind the way my friend's death preyed on mine. All the torture I went through was for the damndable reputation of the *infamous* L. I want to destroy the it for all the pain it caused me."

Light had nothing to say to this. What *could* he say? B had such pain and such anger that Light couldn't argue that any of it wasn't valid. No, under a different set of circumstances, Light might've been on his side. The problem was, his efforts to get his revenge made him a threat to Light and the people he cared about.

B huffed out a laugh. "But in the end, he and this little pet detective caught me before I could finish. I failed that time."

"'Pet detective'?" Light repeated.

B played with the draw in his drink, somewhat disinterested. "She ended up being a surprising hindrance to me. Without her, I might've won. An FBI agent by the name of Naomi Misora."

Light's blood ran cold. It just kept getting worse, didn't it? B had a vendetta against L, he'd already threatened Touta, and now Light found out that Naomi had screwed over B in the past, too! He was almost expecting B to launch into a long rant about how Light's dad arrested B's dad in his youth or something, so he wanted to kill Light's entire family. It wouldn't even come as a surprise at this point.

"Well, I'm getting tired of this game, so I'll give you the chance to ask one more question after my last one." B said, apparently having gotten enough of what he'd been looking to get.

"Why did you write down the names of the people you killed?" His dark eyes pierced into Light as he glanced up through his bangs at him.

Light steadied himself in the face of the dangerous question he'd just been asked. "I wanted to make sure I didn't forget the spelling if I decided to kill them later. The spelling is actually important so I didn't want to make a stupid mistake like that." He gave a small admission of truth, deciding that it was the lesser of two evils.

B hummed. "Duly noted. Your last question. Make sure to make it good~"

Light took a few moments to think things over. There was still much that he wanted to know, but he supposed the most immediate thing he needed to know now was… "What was your goal here? Blackmailing me to bring me here and play this stupid little question and answer game?"

Obviously, he wanted to find out more about Light just like Light wanted to know more about him, but that had to be in service of a

bigger goal. Was he trying to see if Light could be an ally against L, like he'd indicated? Did he want to locate Light's weaknesses to use them against him to catch Kira? Was that his plan, so he could beat L by catching Kira before he could? If that was what he was trying to do, this was a strange way to go about it. Strange and yet eerily reminiscent about how L chose to approach him at his college exams.

"My goal?" B gave another toothy smile. "Just to share the company of someone I find unfathomably interesting. After all, there's so much about you that defies logical explanation. When you meet someone like that, sometimes the best thing to do is to just ask them about it rather than spinning your wheels like an idiot." With a cheeriness that Light couldn't help but be annoyed by, B lifted his drink to Light's. "Cheers."

~ ❶ ~

When L got a phone call right as he and Light were about to leave the store, he'd initially thought it was Watari. A quick glance at the number, however, indicated otherwise. The call was coming from an unknown number and he knew all of Watari's alternate phone numbers. Still, not just anyone could get his number, so he'd simply have to answer to find out who it was and what it was about.

He should've known it was Beyond.

Beyond hadn't engaged him directly last time, choosing to go through Ms. Misora instead, but it seems this time he was more impatient. He was even bolder.

L had quickly excused himself to Light with it being about the case and moved to the back of the store, keeping an eye out in case Light thought to follow him and listen in. He didn't want Light to overhear this.

“You alone now?” Beyond asked after a moment, a smile evident in his voice. “I waited for you to get your distance. Aren’t I considerate?”

“Indeed you are, but I can’t help wondering what your game here is. I beat you before, I’ll do it again. What could you hope to achieve that you didn’t the first time?” L asked him.

“Don’t bother yourself about that. Instead, why don’t you focus on that little investigation of yours? Have you checked in on Matt and Mello lately? Pretty bold of you to leave them alone for so long while knowing I’m here.” Beyond intoned.

“What would you want with them?” L asked.

“Information, of course. Maybe if they were older, they’d be able to hold up to torture, but they’re still young, after all. It would benefit you to keep a better eye on your subordinates, you know. You should be more careful when leaving your people alone.” There was a cackle from the other end of the line and then Beyond hung up, letting L stare at his phone for a moment. Then his fingers flew across the screen as he typed in Watari’s main number. Watari picked up on the first ring and L wasted no time in relaying what Beyond had said to him.

“I just spoke with them a few hours ago, but let me check again.” Watari took a few minutes and when he came back to the phone, he told L that the boys were just fine. That Beyond hadn’t approached them and he was most likely just trying to antagonize L. L thanked him and hung up, pressing his phone to his lips as he thought it over.

Was Beyond calling him and telling him that he’d taken the boys just a

method of antagonizing him? Surely he would've known that L would check the validity of his statement immediately and it would be only a minor inconvenience when he found out Beyond was lying. If he truly wanted to upset L, he would've known to choose a method that couldn't be so easily swept aside. Was there something else he was hoping to achieve by this?

Suddenly, L's eyes widened as he recalled something Beyond had said during the call. About how L should be careful not to leave people alone.

L quickly rushed back to where Light should have been waiting, only to be met with nothing.

And a sales associate who looked surprised to see him, telling him that he and Light had left together a minute ago.

Chapter End Notes

> Something crazy in three chapters…
>
> Also: Would you believe me if I told you that I had the scene where Light pointed out the flaws in B's act written months ago and I wrote the rest of the chapter around it? Because I did~

Doubts and Dilemmas

Chapter Summary

> L scrambles to make sense of the situation and Mello is doing something impulsive again.

Chapter Notes

> I'm late! Hello! I'm alive! I just got a management position at my workplace and I've been neck deep in training. I'm going to try to get the next chapter out a little early to make up for it, but here's the current one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mello sat in the hotel room, chewing aggressively on dark chocolate. He had to work hard not to grip his bar so tight that he broke it. That would only annoy him even more.

Mello could not *believe* the utter bullshit he was having to deal with. It felt like no matter what he did and where he went, he was always considered inferior to Near!

Coming here, he finally thought he'd get the chance to prove himself to L, but now L was relegating him to the sidelines for a second time in the same investigation! How could L do this to him?! He was a successor, too! Why did he continue to favor Near so much? Did he really think Near was so much better than him?

He was sitting in the middle of a wrecked room. He'd trashed the place in a rage after L and the others left and hadn't bothered fixing things up. Why bother? It wouldn't change anything.

His last meeting with L had only gone to show just how little help L thought he was to the Kira case. He just kept trying to push Mello out, like he was regretting asking him to come onto the case with Near.

But why? It wasn't like Near had made any breakthroughs in the case, either! It wasn't fair…

Mello allowed himself to grip his chocolate bar just a little bit tighter. Matt hadn't stopped him from raging about L's treatment of him and his irritation with Near, as he always did, but Mello could tell that he just wanted him to get it out of his system and go along with L's orders. He didn't want to solve the Kira case and prove himself like Mello did and if his behavior when they'd snuck into Light's room was any indication, he wasn't going to be eager to support Mello's plans this time. It felt like…he was really on his own.

It just went to show that when the chips were down, he only had himself to rely on. He couldn't sit waiting for L to give him the chance he deserved, he needed to take it!

And he would.

He'd prove to L that he could catch Kira on his own, if he had to.

Mello had been thinking. Kira didn't kill aimlessly. No, they only killed criminals and it looked like they really researched the individuals beforehand. You could tell that because the kills were slow and they didn't rely on just individuals already being prosecuted. There were criminals that the law wasn't aware of yet among Kira's victims.

If Light was Kira, he would've been smart enough to not leave any trace on his computer, so Mello didn't hold out hope that he could get anything from Light's internet search history. But surely he would need his phone and computer to do that research. Unless omnipotence was part of Kira's supernatural skillset, they needed some way to access the internet and potentially law enforcement databases. Light was basically always at investigation central and he wouldn't dare use

a computer to look for his next kills with L right there. So just maybe…if Mello stole his phone and laptop, he could goad Light into a confrontation.

It was a desperate move, but he wasn't sure what other options he had. Kira had been good at covering his tracks and he'd proven he could kill with just the power of his mind, even while being watched. Mello didn't have the kind of time it would take to get his hands on enough evidence to convince L. He didn't have that kind of time to prove himself! And even if he stumbled upon some magical evidence that'd been overlooked until now, he was worried now more than ever that Near would be the one to benefit from his hard work and get the credit for it. That, more than anything, Mello could not stand the idea of.

He had to try taking Light's devices. If Light bought a new one of either, Mello would just have to steal it again. Without them, Light couldn't research his kills properly. It would either grind his kills to a halt, which would be Mello's proof of guilt, or it would goad Light into confronting him about it. Maybe if Mello could make him angry, he could finally get somewhere.

It was dangerous but the case was already dangerous.

And he had no choice.

~ Ⓚ ~

L's mind whirled as he considered what had happened in his absence.

B had made his move, obviously. L had been expecting it to happen soon, but he was surprised and taken off-guard that he made it with Light. L had whipped out his phone and dialed Watari's number a

second time before two seconds had passed. His immediate order? Telling Watari to use the tracker they'd placed on Light's phone and relay the location to him.

They left on foot and L wanted to believe that B hadn't gotten Light into a car, so he asserted that he would head the direction they went himself once Watari had one for him.

"I will, of course, do as you say, L." Watari started and L heard the "but" before he'd even started on the second half. "But if I may, you sound more personally invested in this than you normally do. It's unlike you to get emotional over trivial matters."

L stared at the phone, shocked at the accusation of him becoming emotional over this. What was worse, even as L opened his mouth to immediately refute the claim - because *of course* he wasn't - but he froze before the words left his mouth. Instead, the words he found himself saying were, "Tell me when you have a location and I'll make a decision once I know their distance." And he hung up.

He continued to stare at his phone.

Am I being emotional?

His mind whirred as he evaluated himself. He was aware of his feelings towards Light, he was, but that was a different proposition than suggesting he was letting those feelings interfere with how he would act within a case.

He considered his previous thought. Why had he thought that he'd like to believe B hadn't kidnapped Light in a car? He'd never thought like that before in his life. There was no point in thinking about what one would *like* , only what was probable. And what was probable was

that Light had indeed gotten into a car, in which case he would be moving quickly.

After all, if L was kidnapping someone, he would not have even considered remaining on foot for even a minute. If B had tricked Light into believing he was L, then he'd want to get Light in his control as quickly as possible before Light caught on, which Light would do very quickly.

That was only the immediate assumption of events, however. L didn't normally deal with assumptions. No, if this were any other situation, he would think it was foolish to assume Light's innocence in this whole thing out-of-hand. Yes, B had a penchant for pretending to be L and fooling people, but that didn't mean he could automatically assume that was what happened here.

For all L knew, B had approached Light and told him his real identity, offering to work together. Light was a suspect in the current case. It wasn't abnormal to think that Light would be willing to work together with B in order to remove himself from the list of suspects, once and for all. Such thoughts made him consider whether he had been too soft towards Light.

It wasn't as if L had much relationship experience. Watching other people's relationships through a screen was about as close as he got. Was Light playing him? Or simply taking advantage? And if he was, would L know how a normal relationship would be different from that?

L closed his eyes and tried to think about his parent's relationship. If he focused hard, he could just about remember their voices, but he couldn't recall what their relationship was to each other. With him, he could remember them being harsh with him, even before being abandoned in a park in the middle of winter.

Even as a child, he'd known it was because of his intelligence. He wasn't the normal child they'd wanted. He didn't act the way a normal child his age should and his parents disliked that he was observant and seemed to know far more than even some adults. His father, in particular, hated being corrected on anything, even when he was obviously wrong.

He'd lived with them until he was eight years old, but he'd spent most of that time alone in his room. He remembered his mother being passive and depressed and his dad being an irate drunkard. L was still surprised to this day that he'd come from such people.

At any rate, he'd always known he wasn't what his parents wanted so on the day he'd been left at the park and told they'd pick him up later and to stay there, he'd been very sure they weren't coming back. When it started to get dark and they still weren't back, he knew it was the truth. He hadn't been dressed for the cold temperature either so L still wondered if they'd expected him to freeze to death.

He might've, but that was where he met Watari, the man who would become his adoptive father. He bought him warm clothes and took him to Wammy's House and L never saw his birth parents again.

He'd never missed them, but L could admit to himself that much of how he viewed family and parenting came from them. Light, L supposed, confused and disconcerted him because he was everything L's parents weren't. L couldn't imagine his parents being very affectionate towards each other but that was all Light ever was towards him. Light's affection and his teasing.

The way Light talked about having a family one day was soft and wistful, as if he was crafting a dream. To L, family was something hard and cold and empty, but to Light it seemed to be different. And the way he cooed over Near and hovered over him, it was unlike anything L had seen before. Light acted like his successor was some precious thing just for existing, always concerned about if he was cold

or if he was working too hard or this or that…

L didn't know what to make of it, but then, L could admit he had an atypical upbringing. He wanted to ask Light honestly what his ideas about “family” were and why L had a place in this dream of his. L was fully confident in his intellect and his abilities, but why on Earth Light preferred him as the partner in this vision instead of someone who had the kind of childhood Light did, he couldn't fathom.

L felt certain that he was a puzzle piece that didn't fit into the scene, but Light insisted on including him anyway. It was becoming as pleasant as it was perplexing. But the situation wasn't simple. They weren't just classmates who liked each other, they were an investigator and a subject. A part of him couldn't feel comfortable allowing himself to forget the circumstances surrounding them.

He couldn't help but wonder if he’d unintentionally let his guard down and now it was going to redound on him. Light could have been unknowingly tricked into leaving with B *or* he could've been a willing participant. Two criminals in cahoots. If that was the case…If he was being too emotional about Light and it was causing him to make mistakes, L knew what the correct response was.

He had to find a way to shut it down.

But for the moment, L had to prioritize the more immediate problem, which was finding Light and Beyond and separating the two of them.

L’s mind sorted through the endless possibilities of what could have happened, but his phone ringing as Watari called him back brought him back to his senses. He could think about the possibilities all he wanted, but right now, he was operating on far too little information to make such speculations effective.

L's phone buzzed again, this time with a text message. Watari located Light's phone and it wasn't far from where L currently was. Watari informed him that it didn't look like his phone had moved in a while, but L still decided to hurry there before they *did* move.

The precise location was a little spotty and in a shopping district, that meant he could be in any number of stores. However, as L got closer, Watari was able to let him know how close he was to Light's dot on the map, which eventually led L to standing outside of a restaurant.

But what on Earth was B doing taking Light to a restaurant?

He paused before going in, looking through the glass to see if Light and B were anywhere near the entrance. B would probably be on the lookout for him, waiting there with Light, so L had to be on guard if he didn't want B to see him before he was ready to be seen.

How should he get Light out of there, preferably without being seen by B at all? What's more, he still didn't know how willing Light was in this. Drawing Light away would be relatively easy if Light still didn't know B wasn't him but if B had drawn Light away under the pretense of being L and then came out with the truth with the intent to work together…and Light accepted it, then…

But L didn't see them from the entrance, which made logical sense. They would have wanted privacy, so somewhere hidden in an alcove would be preferable. So L cautiously made his way into the establishment, shrugging off the greetings from the staff saying they would be with him in a moment.

It didn't take L long to find where Light was. He was sitting at one of the tables half-hidden behind potted plants, looking casual and

unharmed. And alone.

L was almost more nervous as he proceeded towards Light's table after seeing him alone. It was just so unexpected. Why wouldn't B have been here waiting with Light and why would he just leave? What on Earth was going on? L's mind whirled as he proceeded to the table.

When he got close enough, Light noticed his presence and turned to greet him, a large smile on his face. "Hideki! I'm glad to see you here! You'd never believe the weird thing that just happened!"

~ ❶ ~

Light had decided a few minutes before L showed up that he was going to hide the fact that he knew B wasn't L immediately. Partially, it was because he didn't put it past L to theorize that Light could see people's names from that information despite that not being the only reason he knew Beyond wasn't him. Mostly though, it was because Light wanted to keep the information private in case he wanted to use it for later. He might find it useful some time to pretend not to be able to tell the difference between L and B.

He was pleasantly surprised that L showed up to the restaurant. He thought he might need to head back to the hotel on his own, but he shouldn't have bothered thinking about it. L, as always, clearly had a way to track him. Light could concern himself with that later.

L looked disconcerted as Light greeted him happily, but wordlessly took a seat across from Light anyway. Truthfully, after Beyond left Light could have headed back, but he'd instead taken the time to sit alone and think over everything he'd heard from B. It was a lot to go through.

Beyond could have been lying about all of it, of course, but…he'd had real anger towards L. Light was jittery with the strong urge to find out how much truth was behind what B said. Whatever the case was, he was getting crazy energy from the guy. After all, he was wearing makeup to imitate L, a man he clearly hated. No sane person does that, right?

Beyond had said that looking like L was his effort at mockery and maybe a part of that was true, but Light had to wonder if there was more to it than that. From everything he'd said about being forced to train for who knew how many years to be just like L, maybe it took a stronger hold on Beyond psychologically than the guy wanted to admit to him.

After all, would it be that strange if a part of Beyond, deep down, wanted to *become* L and not just his successor? He'd been trained to be the next L in a way that sounded like it was bleeding into brainwashing. Light knew that human beings could be so complicated. It was possible to hate someone with everything you had and also want to be them.

Light also thought of Beyond's friend. Was the story he told him true? Did L really result in Beyond's friend killing himself? It wasn't like Light had a right to judge, giving all the killing he was doing, but there was something terrible about specifically preying on the fragile minds of children until they lose the will to live and commit suicide. It was…horrible.

If the torment that both Beyond and his friend received in L's name, then Light felt certain then nothing but death would satisfy him, which Light couldn't allow. He cared too much about L and, honestly, he had no room to judge anyone about their past actions. He was pretty sure he won the most prizes for poor past judgment.

Still, he needed to know. That was why he needed to go back to the hotel where Ryuk was lurking around Near. He hadn't thought he'd

need to so soon, but he was going to take the Shinigami King up on his offer to take advantage of his “favorite” status.

Maybe right now I should just be happy that B left without a fuss this time. I don’t think we’re going to be so lucky next time, so I need to prepare.
“You probably want to know what happened. I’m sorry if I worried you.” Light said with a smile, his tone less bouncy than before.

“I *would* like to know why you left the store and came here.” L returned, giving nothing else away. As per usual, what L was saying wasn’t as important as what he wasn’t saying. Any suspicions he had about what had happened or how he found Light again were kept to himself.

Light had options, of course, he could lie about even seeing B, but that wouldn’t get him anywhere and they probably passed a half dozen security cameras. On the other end, Light could admit that B approached him, that he had known he wasn’t L, and had followed him to question him for the case. It was an option, but a little too divulging for his taste. Since he wanted to keep hold of any plausible deniability he might need to use later – aka. Pretending to not know the difference between the two – he’d rather go with the option that was somewhere in the middle. The option that was some truth and a lot of lies. His favorite option.

“After you walked away, someone approached me. I thought it was you and he spoke like he was. He suggested we have Watari pick up our bags and go out to lunch. I didn’t know he wasn’t you until we got here, but I should’ve. Here, Light put on a rueful smile. “I should have been thinking about that report of there being someone that looked like you in the area.”

Light accomplished a few things by giving this statement. He was obviously claiming that he was innocent – due to being tricked by B, but more importantly, he was making it clear that he’d connected the person he was with today to the person who was spotted at the police

station. It removed any chance that L could sweep this under the rug as a small incident, unrelated to the overall case.

It was clear from before that L didn't want Light to know anything about B. He didn't want the team to know about B. The way he insisted on looking into it by himself when Light first brought B's presence to his attention told him that much and it wasn't like Light didn't understand why. B was like a blast from the past, a reckoning with a personal grudge. If he involved the team in the investigation, it would be nearly impossible to stop his hidden past and affiliations from unraveling before their eyes.

Beyond would gleefully drag it all up to the surface.

Light was going to force L to acknowledge B's existence to him and – later – the team. L peered at Light for almost thirty seconds, his face impassive. Light was used to these moments when he couldn't read L and no longer squirmed uncomfortably. Instead, he waited quietly with a placid smile on his face until L finally broke the silence.

"That makes sense. If he did look a great deal like me, I am sure it must have been quite convincing." Light was almost sure that L wasn't convinced of the truth of his account, but he would think carefully before admitting it. L loved to be verbally supportive, while harboring silent suspicion. "I'm glad to see you weren't hurt, though."

"Soooo," Light drew off playfully, hopefully taking some attention off Light's semi-interrogation. "Were you worried?"

L gave him an especially deadpan stare. "I am quite sure that you're capable of handling anyone who might cause you trouble." L easily dismissed any threat Light might've been under and Light privately wondered how much of that was genuine. They'd been growing closer and even been going on dates and Light really didn't get the feeling

that it was all manipulation…but then again, L hadn't shown many signs of genuine concern over his well being before. How much would he really worry about Light if something happened?

It's not like Light blamed L for not being concerned about the person he was investigating for murder, but…

Light gave a big smile. "So how did you find me? I was going to wait a little while and then head back to the hotel, but you beat me to it."

"The associate at the store heard you two talking and saw which direction you went in. I asked a few people on my way, as well, and they directed me here." L said, simply.

Well, that's a lie . Light thought. The person at the toy store's cash register was close enough to see them, sure, but no way could they have heard what he and B were saying. And Light was equally sure that L would never have done something so sloppy as ask a bunch of random people for directions, too much risk. He'd be more likely to task the team with doing it for him, if such a thing were necessary.

Light chose not to call him on the lie. He'd known L wasn't going to outright tell him how he'd tracked him down. Why would he? That would be giving away vital information he could use later, like in case Light tried to run away.

"What did he say to you?" L inquired after a moment.

"The guy?" Light asked, as if he didn't know. He pretended to think for a moment. Then, "He said his name was Beyond." He dropped the bomb.

In an uncharacteristic show of surprise, L's eyes popped open. "…he did now, did he?"

Light smiled like an airhead and nodded, ignoring L's reaction. "He did! He wanted to know information about the case, but I didn't tell him anything. He tried to bribe me, though."

L took this in. "What did he attempt to bribe you with, if you don't mind my asking?"

"He was pretty vague about it." Light lied, shamelessly. "But he made allusions to some kind of orphanage. He said we could trade information for information."

L's grip on his knee visibly tightened. "...I see. But you turned him down."

"That's right, I did. Whoever he is, he's obviously shady. I don't need to be making deals with more than one shady guy." Light said, looking to L.

What he was really playing at here was making L feel pressured. Light didn't like that B knew he was Kira and had a piece of the Note with his handwriting on it. He didn't want L treating this like a casual game where he didn't need to put his full attention behind catching B. Especially since L would likely be worried that Light would take advantage of his distraction if he turned his attention fully to catching B.

Not a baseless assumption, but what Light really wanted was the B Situation to be gotten under control. Hopefully, this would agitate L enough to revise his threat assessment of B and get his ass in gear.

And the absolute second Light got back to the hotel, he was going to get out his notebook and tell Ryuk what happened. It's sooner than he'd expected, but he had a favor to ask of the Shinigami King.

~ ⓚ ~

Soichiro Yagani sighed heavily as he left the precinct. It wasn't often he went back to the station since they'd been doing most of their work from the hotel, lately.

In hindsight, maybe that had been partially responsible for the growing distance between those actively involved in the Kira Case and the rest of the JPD.

His boss had called him in that morning to have a chat and Soichiro left the meeting with a foul taste in his mouth. His boss hadn't been the *most* supportive of the investigation, even from the beginning, but that was to be expected. While the world governments respected L's abilities and welcomed his help, on the individual level many people grew irritated when outsiders took part in local cases. Or in L's case, took over them. They felt it was insulting to them, as if they couldn't handle it on their own. It felt as if L's involvement was calling into question their own competency.

Still, Soichiro hadn't realized the rift had grown so much. Certainly, the rift between L and the JPD was strong after most of the investigative team quit when L refused to show his face to them, but when Soichiro had gone into the meeting that day with his boss, he'd seen more than distrust towards L.

The man…the man had spoken of shutting down the Kira Case entirely. That turn in the conversation after a few allusions to L's

efficacy had shocked Soichiro down to his core. And why?

His superior had spoken calmly of public opinion. How L's reputation has started to take a decline ever since he first confronted Kira and how Kira's, in contrast, had only risen. People were saying that Kira was making the world a better place. People were saying that Kira had proven they weren't a tyrant by refusing to kill members of society who hadn't committed serious crimes. People were saying that L was crooked and incompetent. That the JPD were just as bad for working with him.

His boss was considering the idea of pulling the plug on the investigation. He was thinking of announcing that L would have to investigate independently and pull Soichiro and his men from the case.

Soichiro hadn't been able to control his reaction to having all of that dropped on him. He'd burst out in exclamations of horror, leaning forward across the desk, demanding to know if the man had taken leave of his senses.

How could they allow the public to browbeat them into letting a serial killer go free?! How could his boss feel ashamed of aiding L but not of condoning Kira's actions?! If Soichiro felt anything shameful about any of that, it would be not standing by your principles and bowing down in the face of pressure.

Perhaps L hadn't made as much progress on the case as they'd wanted. It was true that in his weaker moments, he too would look back at the last couple months and feel that they were almost back where they started, but he was sure that whatever progress they had made was due entirely to L. L was out there risking his life to catch a supernatural killer when most of the JPD quit almost immediately and all his boss did was sit snuggly behind his desk and criticize those actually doing the real work. And he said as much.

Well, maybe not that very last part.

Standing his ground, he'd managed to convince his boss not to pull the plug for the moment, but he could tell the man was far from convinced as he left. He'd just bought time and it was with a heavy heart that he started to head back to the hotel.

As he left the precinct, he checked his phone to see if he missed any calls and saw a message from his son.

It read: *“Hey, Dad. L and I are back at the hotel. Aizawa told me you got called into a meeting with your boss? I hope things went well, but knowing bureaucracy, you're probably tired, right? Hurry back and we'll order some food. I know just the thing to make you feel better!*

What did he ever do to have such a thoughtful son? Despite the physical and mental exhaustion he was feeling, he found himself smiling.

His son had always been mature and true to his name, he was a shining light that guided the way for the people around him. His son radiated a natural warmth and it drew people to him. His whole team respected his son and Light had become especially close with Misora, Matsuda, and L.

Light was L’s constant support and defender. He seemed to understand L in a way that was equal parts impressive and concerning. Soichiro could see L becoming reliant on it, even if he wasn't sure the man himself was aware of it. When the case was over, L would have to leave to work on other cases. What of his son, then?

Soichiro had been forced to watch his son fall alarmingly fast and yet, when he saw the way Light looked at the detective, he couldn't convince himself that it was a boyish crush that would simply blow over. When L had to leave, would his son really be okay? And if L grew too reliant on Light's warmth to leave him behind, could he stop his son from going with a man who quite frankly was unworthy of him and would only complicate his life?

But he couldn't tell Light any of this. How could he? His precious son looked at L like the man hung the moon, even though the man had accused him of being Kira. He'd only just begun to mend his strained relationship with his son. He couldn't just start talking badly of L and expect Light to take it well.

Soichiro could admit privately to himself that a large part of why he was determined to catch Kira was to remove any further reason for L to focus the investigation back into Light. He was already uncomfortable with the attention L had been focusing on his son so far, but things weren't going so well on that front, either. The chief let out a tired sigh as he slid his phone back into his pocket.

He could only hope that his son's first love didn't leave a shattered mess by the end of it all. But if it did, Soichiro would do his damnedest to clean up every last bit.

~ ❹ ~

Ryuk found it funny.

He'd gone a while without going back to the Shinigami Realm both times he chose to follow Light, but now he's heading back for the second time already. But Light really wanted to know about this clone of his boyfriend and Ryuk had to admit some interest in how something like that could happen.

Light wanted him to ask the Old Man about it, so as soon as Ryuk got to the Shinigami Realm he beelined for the Shinigami King's section of the realm. He flew past any other Shinigami that tried to call out to him and barely waited for Justin to announce him to the King before going in.

"Ryuk." The Shinigami King intoned. "You're back sooner than I expected. What brings you here? Chronos, I presume?"

"Yeah, he's run into an interesting character that might be a problem." Ryuk chuckled.

"And what makes you think that I will be able to help?" The King returned with disinterest. "Most of the goings-on in the mortal realm are beneath my notice. Gods of Death should strive not to concern themselves too often in the affairs of humans." Ryuk might not have been as clever as Light, but he still heard the hint of reproach in the Old Man's tone. Not that he cared.

"A Shinigami's already interfered with this one, though." Ryuk said.

"Oh?" The King's tone gained a small amount of interest. "I assume you're not referring to Chronos."

"Nope!" Ryuk cackled. "There's a human that has the eyes, but doesn't own a Death Note. I could see his lifespan and Light didn't mention it, but he probably sees it, as well."

"Hmm." The King hummed. "And what is this individual's name?"

There was something in his tone that made Ryuk cock his head to the side in curiosity. “It’s Beyond Birthday.”

“Ah, yes. That does sound familiar. I do know something of him.” The King said.

Ryuk waited a tick, but the being didn’t continue.

“Well?” Ryuk flapped his wings, irritably.

The Shinigami King sighed, several millennia’s worth of exhaustion audible in it. “This is a matter which does not concern you. Go back to Chronos.”

“What!” Ryuk jerked in surprise. He just wasn’t going to tell him what’s up? “Didn’t you hear when this guy has started causing Light problems? That makes it our concern!”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t help Chronos. Just that the matter didn’t concern you.” The King said in the same calm tone. “Go back to Chronos. Tell him that I will only share the information with him and for that, he needs to come here. If it is a request from him, then it is a matter that I will only discuss with Chronos.”

“…can he do that?” Ryuk didn’t know. He’d never seen a situation like Light before.

“He can if you act as his wings, as he is in between worlds at the moment.” The King said. “Tell him he must come himself next time if he wants to know that badly. I will speak to only him on the matter.”

Ryuk had never considered flying Light back to their realm himself; hadn't thought about if it would work at all. It wasn't like Light was fully human anymore, but he had kind of assumed that Light would live out the rest of his human life before returning to their home realm.

But even if Light could get here, it would still annoy Light to make the trip in the middle of everything. "Come on. Can't you let me in on the joke? I like a good laugh as well as anyone else."

"Go." Was the only thing the Old Man said, followed by the creaking of the chains holding his body up. Annoyed and muttering under his breath, Ryuk flew away from that section of the realm. Light wasn't going to be very happy with what he had to say when he got back.

Chapter End Notes

> Beyond is the serial killer and the one making himself look like L and yet the real irony here is that for all intents and purposes, L is probably the "evil twin" of the two with how I'm writing them. Or at least, L was the one who screwed B over first.
>
> Something crazy in two chapters…

Simmer

Chapter Summary

L needs this to be over and Mello has a meltdown.

Chapter Notes

This chapter went through a massive rewrite at one point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Crap!” Light yelled, as they were getting out of the car in front of the hotel.

L had insisted on staying at the restaurant until Watari came to pick them up. Neither of the men with him so much as flinched, despite the sudden explosive swearing.

“Something wrong, Light?” L asked, moderately. He glanced up at Light through his fringe. L had been quieter than normal since the whole thing with B happened and Light had been worrying over it the whole ride back, but at that exact moment, he was more concerned about--

“We forgot Near’s toys back at the store!” Light exclaimed.

The deadpan look L shot him reeked of “we have bigger things to worry about”, but Light didn’t care at all. This was a big deal to *him!* He put so much effort into picking out every single one of those gifts, so much thought…

It must have showed on his face because L sighed. “I’ll have Watari call the store and organize a time to go pick it up. I still have the receipt. If you’re willing to wait a couple days, you can still give them to Near.”

Light nodded, sulkily. He didn't like the idea of waiting to do it, especially over such a stupid mistake, but he could wait a few days, he supposed. "Can you keep it a secret from Near until the toys get here? I want it to be a surprise." L hummed in response and Light took that as his agreement.

As soon as they got to the upper floors, they walked into the team meeting room and found the rest of the team there, each one looking either gloomy or troubled.

"Hi, everyone. Is everything alright? You all look a bit…" Light drew off softly, not exactly knowing how to put it tactfully. They all looked like they got the invitation to a funeral and weren't sure if they wanted to attend or not.

"Oh, hi, Light! It's nothing big, just…" Touta greeted, nervously.

"Bad news from the head of the JPD." Naomi finished for him, looking somber but one of the least troubled out of the whole group. Maybe it was the FBI training for keeping her expression neutral or maybe it was just that she was the only one there besides L who *wasn't* part of the Japanese police department.

The news caused Light's eyes to immediately go to his father, who looked even more worn down. He was staring listlessly at the carpet, a faraway look in his eyes. Worry stirred in his gut at the sight and before he knew it, he practically teleported to his father's side, placing his hand on the older man's shoulder.

His dad jumped slightly at the contact, but at least it got him to look away from the floor. When his eyes landed on Light, a tired but genuine smile broke out across his face and Light found himself giving

a worried one of his own. “What’s going on, Dad?” He asked quietly, just above a whisper, but it carried in the mostly silent room, taking the gently encouraging note with it.

His dad gave a little sigh and while taking strength from his son’s presence, turned to L who was watching them quietly. He was ready for the apparently tough conversation. “My boss wants to pull the plug on the investigation. Although he’s willing to stay his hand for now, he wanted to pull us from the case and let Kira go.” None of the other investigators reacted at his declaration, clearly already having been told the particulars.

Neither Light nor L reacted, either, for both the same and different reasons.

They probably both foresaw this eventuality clearly, Light considered. Light, because the same thing had happened in his first life, and L, because he foresaw most eventualities. After all, L was the one who built an entire building with a helipad because he thought it might be needed. And Light…well, he wasn’t threatening the JPD anymore like he was in a previous life, but now the police had new reasons to not want to catch Kira.

Pride was a big motivator for bureaucracy, after all. While at first, not wanting to admit that Kira was doing their jobs for them would’ve motivated the police to want him caught, eventually the tide of public opinion would make it undesirable to them. They wouldn’t want to be labeled as “the bad guys” for arresting society’s hero or whatever it was they were calling him these days. Plus, their failure to catch him would probably start getting embarrassing after a while, on top of everything else. At some point, they’d just want to stop actively investigating him so they could say that’s the reason why Kira hasn’t been caught, rather than it being Kira outsmarting them at every turn.

“I see.” Was L’s complete non-reaction. He calmly proceeded further

into the room and took one of the seats further away from everyone else, like he usually did. “Well, it wasn’t completely unexpected.”

“What do you mean?” Aizawa questioned, surprised at L’s declaration.

L hummed in agreement. “Surely you must’ve known that, too, on some level. You all must be aware to varying degrees about how the public views Kira.” His words were greeted with silence from the rest of the room. A few of the members of the group glanced at each other, but no one said anything in response.

What could they say? All you had to do was open up a computer and look up Kira’s fan forums to get an influx of results, from social media sites with pages to Kira set up to whole websites made specifically to talk about or support Kira. People were so comfortable about Kira, that they were happy discussing him in the streets or at check-out lines. Like they were talking about the weather. Discomfort permeated the room. Light wondered if they were starting to get the idea of what he was trying to do here; what his plan this time was.

Before, Light had been brash and immature. He tried to brute force his way through things and bend others to his will. The will of Kira. This time, though? He was an attritionist. He wasn’t looking to force people to agree to his viewpoints, he was trying to outlast them.

Since the beginning, Kira had slowly been going from a world-ending oddity that blew onto the scene, to something normal. Accepted. He was slowly sliding into the area where he was thought of as a part of life. Someone who had always been there, even if that wasn’t true. When people think of something as a normal facet of life, trying to extract it becomes a dangerous game to play. People didn’t like change and they grew complacent over time as long as something didn’t affect them directly.

Not killing members of law enforcement (who were innocent, anyway) played into that well, even if that wasn't the reason he was doing it. With most of the police starting to feel safe from him as time went on and Light actually doing them the service of weeding out the disgraceful among them, it was easier than it was in his first life for them to ignore Kira's actions more and more. He felt less threatening to them, less of a wildcard. Slowly but surely, Light would become an accepted fixture of the cultural zeitgeist and how long could any one group, no matter how determined, actively fight against *that?*

Light knew for a fact that the majority of the team didn't cotton onto the nature of his game before, but he wondered how many were starting to do so now.

"Then…what do we do?" Touta once again asked the pertinent question.

"Maybe we should think about moving to a more permanent base. Jumping from hotel to hotel isn't a very stable long-term solution." Light suggested, knowing that L had just such a thing prepared since the start of the case. Of course, the downside to the investigators was that it would pretty much negate the need to go back to the police station at all. Hotel rooms had a limit on how much they could be equipped with and their comings and goings were still nowhere near private, even with precautions.

But a multi-layer monstrosity with a helipad on the roof? They didn't even really need to go *home* , never mind the station. The Kira Investigators were already the "out group" at their workplace, their involvement in such a dangerous case isolating them from their fellows. If their investigation moved to the new building, their social isolation would intensify and solidify. Of course, Light was very eager to see that happen. Controlling a narrative was easier in a bubble and if the ostracization combined with the stress of the case eventually takes its toll on them and makes them start to reconsider giving up on catching him, then all the better.

It took Light a few seconds before he realized that L had tensed up at his mention of the building. He…may have made a mistake bringing up the building, though. He was eager to move there already, but L had always been good at picking up on seemingly innocuous comments and making a big deal out of them. Light especially should've been more careful about what he said because of how weird L was still acting. The man was *tense* and Light wasn't sure if B showing up was really the whole reason.

"Well," L started, and Light wasn't sure if he was imagining the slight strain there. "The first thing we must determine before anything else is how many of us want to stay on if the worst happens and the Japanese police department pull their support for the case."

A ripple of unease went through the room.

"You'll all have to ask yourselves how dedicated you are to this case." L continued. "For myself, it won't be a difficult adjustment, since the Japanese police outside of those present have been reluctant with their support for some time now, but for you all, I expect there will be significant pressure placed on you once your department fully decides to withdraw from the case." He finished, not sugar-coating anything.

And in the wake of that truth bomb, you could've heard a pin drop.

"Hey! Light!" Light fought the instinctual urge to jump when Ryuk flew through the wall in a hurry.

Light turned his head slightly to glare at the other Shinigami. *What? Couldn't Ryuk tell him what the King said* ***later*** *?*

"There's a kid in your room!" Wait, what? "Or your and L's room, I guess. He's putting your laptop in a backpack. It's that kid from

before!” Kid from before..?

If Ryuk saw a kid then it could only be one of two people and Light had a strong suspicion about which one it was. Light forced himself to take two silent, very long breaths. When he was sure he could sound calm and unhurried, he turned his attention back to the rest of the room, who were talking amongst themselves.

“I feel like I’m the only one who doesn’t have a stake in this. I’m the only one who doesn’t work with or for a government agency.” Light gave a small laugh. “Why don’t you all talk about your concerns with L and you guys can figure out what you want to do as a group?”

Light was actually being a little helpful here. He still remembered how they’d reacted to the ultimatum last time they were faced with abandoning the case or being fired. They all worked through their feelings on their own instead of leaning on each other and talking it through together. Maybe this time, it would be less difficult for them.

“Then what are you going to do, Light?” Touta asked.

“L and I had an eventful outing just now, so I’m going to rest a bit, don’t worry about me.” He waved, turned on his heel, and strode towards the door. He thought he heard “rest well”, but as the door closed, he was already speed walking towards the room he and L were staying in. He burst into the room, badly startling Mello, who froze like a deer in headlights when he saw him.

Light let the door swing closed behind him but stayed close by, only venturing in a few feet. The kid was so inexperienced that he practically telegraphed when he thought about trying to make a break for it, his eyes darting quickly to the door before flicking to Light and back again. He was probably trying to judge the distance.

Light let the kid bolt for the door - which he *did* - and waited until Mello was in arm's reach, before lashing out quickly and grabbing the kid's arm and swung him around. At the same time, his other hand grabbed the bag hanging off the kid's other shoulder, using the momentum to slip it off.

"No!" Mello yelled, sounding borderline hysterical as Light pushed him back further into the room and then opened the bag. Just as he'd expected, there was a laptop. Light sighed, tossing his laptop gently onto the nearest bed.

"Don't you ever get tired of failure?" Light asked him casually, dropping the backpack onto the ground. Admittedly, that was a bit of a harsh thing to say, but Light had long since passed the point of frustration with the kid.

The kid's eyes flashed and for a second and he grit his teeth, harshly. Surprisingly though, he visibly held himself back from responding. Light saw the shifting of Mello's expression and knew he was going to make a break for it again. The kid just really wanted out, it looked like, but this couldn't be allowed to end the same way as last time.

Mello actually looked like he was going to run into the ensuite bathroom - and probably lock himself inside, but Light was faster. He jumped forward to grab the kid's wrist and held tight, jerking the boy to a stop. Mello immediately started struggling. Light wasn't holding him enough to cause pain, but Mello was still just a kid. He couldn't break free, regardless.

When Mello realized that, he started freaking out harder. He yelled about being let go and clawed violently at Light's wrist with his other hand. Light fought not to wince and endured the onslaught. He'd seen kids freak out like this at the mall or in department stores before, although they were younger than Mello was. The responses from those

kids' parents usually fell somewhere between ignoring their tantruming child and trying to placate them.

If I just keep holding onto his arm and not letting go, he'll probably calm down. Light thought. He glanced at Mello – flailing around, snarling – and winced. *Though…it might take a while.*

Whatever the response, he couldn't just let Mello go this time around. The mini detective was determined to be a thorn in his side. He'd let him run off once after screwing with him and he just came right back again for more nonsense. He had to figure out a way to end this now. He couldn't handle Mello on top of L and B.

Mello took a few more minutes to calm down, which was quicker than Light had expected. Then again, with how wild his thrashing was, maybe it should be expected that he managed to exhaust himself faster. As it was, he was now slightly hunched over. His head was hanging down with his hair falling over his eyes, breathing heavily. He stayed like that for another minute and Light let him. Hopefully, having the time to wind down would keep him calm. It wasn't like Light was eager to break the silence, either.

"Let go." Mello heaved out.

Light felt the strong urge to roll his eyes, but resisted the impulse. Why wasn't he surprised that was the first thing Mello said to him? Light sighed, already done with this. "I can't do that. You've been a pain in my ass and we have to have a talk."

"You're going to get arrested for this! This is kidnapping!" Mello snarled. It looked like he was getting worked up again, so Light carefully counted ten seconds in his head before he responded, forcing some much needed calm back into the situation. Then he raised an eyebrow and said, "I don't think it's kidnapping if I caught someone

who snuck into my personal space and tried to steal from me. You came here on your own, I just snapped you from leaving. Although that does beg the question: what do you think you were doing?"

"None of your fucking business!" Mello sneered again.

This little brat, Light took a deep breath. "It is my business. I'd like to know whose business your stealing my stuff is more than mine, but I expect you don't have an actual answer to that." The last part was said wryly and it caused the scowl on Mello's face to deepen.

Okay, how to deal with this? I need to be the adult here, but the kid isn't going to just calm down and respect me as an adult, Light considered for a moment. I can't drag this out, either. The longer I do, the more likely it is we'll be interrupted and nothing will get resolved.

So what was the best way to go about it? With Near, Light could use kid gloves. He reacted well to being parented and wasn't emotionally taxing at all. But Light didn't highly rate the option of treating Mello the same way he treated Near and it wasn't just because he wasn't very fond of the guy. If anything, the boy would take kid gloves as an insult.

Mello wasn't going to tell Light what he was doing trying to steal his laptop, he could see that. The kid was in Stubborn Mode and honestly, it was the right move to not give your plans away. Annoying, but the right move. Rather than waste valuable time trying to get information he wasn't going to get, he should try his luck getting to the crux of the matter. "This needs to stop." Light said, authoritatively.

"What are you talking about now?" Mello demanded.

"This behavior where you sneak into my room and root through my

things because you have a problem with me." He said directly. "I don't know who taught you this behavior, but it needs to stop now." That first part was a lie. He knew exactly who Mello had learned that kind of behavior from and now the burden of correcting it was falling to him.

Mello pouted and glared at the ground, refusing to answer like the petulant child he was.

"Look, does anyone know you're here?" Light questioned, wondering if L was in on it or not. Pretty sloppy, if he was, but maybe L was getting desperate. That could explain why he was acting off, Light supposed.

"You can't get away with killing me!" Mello howled. "They'll know it was you just by looking at the cameras!"

"That's not what I *meant.* " Light grit out, feeling a headache start to form. *Little brat.* ***Always*** *a pain in my ass. Why can't he be more like Near? Near's a lovely child while this one flies into hysterics every other hour. Breaking and entering and* ***now*** *stealing my stuff!*

"Look, I know where this obsession with me is coming from. It's spreading from Hid—L, but you need to stop all of this. You're committing crimes; you're not going to get anywhere like this." And the absolute last thing Light wanted to see happen again was Mello getting so used to breaking the law for a case that he joins the mafia again.

"You're just saying that because I'm getting close!" Mello objected, harshly.

" *No* , you're not." Light insisted. "You're just making a nuisance of

yourself. What's the point of this, huh?" Light shook him a little.

"To beat Near!!" Mello burst out.

Light raised an incredulous eyebrow. "That's it? To beat your co-investigator? You don't have any grand ambitions; it's really that simple?"

"It's not simple!" Mello insisted, getting even more riled up. "And it *is* a big deal! I've never beaten Near before! This is my *chance!* I can't lose it!"

Light gave an exhausted sigh. "Well, better luck on the next case because – and I hate to tell you this – the chances of you beating both Near and L on the same case is practically zero. In fact, if I were you, I'd start managing my expectations now. I don't even think you'd be able to beat Near if he were working alone on this case." Because he hadn't before, why should he be able to do so now when he was a child? Near had been the one to beat him in the end. Mello was only breaking his own heart by convincing himself he could beat both Near and L and in the process, he'd probably tear everything apart like he did last time. All things considered, he was shaping up to be just about the same as his older self and Light really didn't want to be seeing that.

"…shut up."

"What?" Light was jerked out of his thoughts by the low murmur he practically didn't hear at all.

"I said, SHUT UP!!" Mello yelled at the top of his lungs, putting his hands on Light's chest and pushing him so hard that Light actually stumbled back and let go of Mello's arm. But the kid didn't dash

towards the door again. Instead, he rounded on Light, standing his ground defiantly with his hands fisted at his sides and his face twisted into a snarl. The abrupt escalation surprised Light but what surprised him even more was the slight wetness he saw in Mello's eyes. It was barely there but…was he crying?

"H—Hey…" Light held up a hand, but it froze. Part of him wanting to comfort but another part…unsure. It's not like he meant to make the kid cry, but he couldn't quite get himself to reach out to him, either. The kid being *Mello* .

"No, no, no, no!" Mello yelled, sounding a mixture of angry and frantic. "I *will* beat Near! I *have* to! I can't live with myself if I don't!"

Oh, that was a concerning statement, right there. Light kind of hoped he didn't mean that literally. Well…it would solve a lot of Mello-related future problems if he wasn't around, but that's a bit…

"You don't have to beat Near." Light said in a tone that was deliberately soft to try and deescalate the situation he'd unintentionally made worse. "I don't know what's making you think that, but—"

"Stop talking down to me like I'm stupid!" Mello yelled, followed by what sounded like a little wheeze. "I'm just as capable as he is! Why does it have to be Near? Every single time! It's *always* him and I'm *sick* of being leftovers! I c—I can't—" Mello made a wet choking sound and to Light's utter horror and astonishment, he collapsed onto his knees and started sobbing.

And that was how Light found himself standing in front of his past enemy, completely frozen, while they cried on the floor.

Oh my God. Light found himself thinking dully, almost in shock. *I pushed him off the edge.*

Light didn't know *how* he'd done it, but it was clear now that he did. He hadn't even been trying to. Actually…in an abstract way, the situation kind of reminded him of when his dad had his heart attack, in both human lives. Light hadn't been *trying* to stress his dad out that much and a good part of it was L's fault, too, but his actions had unintentionally pushed someone over the edge before, hadn't they? What was it this time? Something he said or was it just the Kira Case driving people to the brink?

Light stepped forward slowly, trying not to startle the kid. He just kept sobbing. Light was pretty sure this qualified as an emotional breakdown. "Hey, Kid, come on…" Light tried to go for levity but of course, it didn't work. "Look, I take back what I said before, alright? You still have a chance to beat Near. What do I know, right? So…" God, Light felt so awkward now.

Why had this situation fallen into his lap, again? He didn't sign up for this! He didn't sign up for emotionally supporting the person who kidnapped his sister! Light swore he was going to tear into L for this later, once the man was out of his funk. He wouldn't be in this situation now if L wasn't apparently running some black market facility that churned out mentally unwell individuals.

L probably traumatized this boy the way B claimed he was traumatized and then threw him into a case with a supernatural serial killer. The man could be so unhinged sometimes and now it was *spreading* .

Mello gave a few wet coughs, like he was choking on his own tears, and then looked up to glare at Light. Which might've been intimidating if Light didn't have multiple murders under his belt, Mello wasn't still a child, and if he hadn't still been crying. "Don't patronize me."

At least some of his fight was back. That had to be good. “I’m not.” Light sighed. This time, he actually *wanted* to reach out and comfort the kid a little, but he imagined it would be poorly received if he did.

“I just think…” *You’re blowing things out of proportion.* “You’re making it into too big of a deal. Who cares if you beat Near this time? It’s probably your first case, right? Can’t imagine you’ve had many of them…no one’s first time doing something is their *best* . There’ll be other times and that’s assuming either of you will solve the case. L could still solve this on his own.” Not that that’d happen either, if Light had his way.

Light’s voice had become progressively more soothing as he spoke. Mello was quiet for a while, his head drooping towards the ground and his bangs covering his face. It looked like the fight had left him again and Light couldn’t decide if that was a good thing or a bad thing with this one.

Finally… “I care.” Mello replied, quietly.

“Huh?” Light said, not really hearing him.

“I care.” Mello repeated, louder this time. “Because if I come in second place one more time, I’m just useless. Success is *everything* and I’m not successful unless Near *isn’t* . We’re always compared to each other. *Always* .”

"Being the best isn't everything." Light tried.

"You don't get to say that! You don't!" Mello yelled, gaining steam. "Because…because if you're not the best, you're nothing. You…how

smart you are, how much of a prodigy compared to your peers determines how worth it you are!"

"'Worth it?' Worth what?" Light asked.

"Everything!" Mello exploded. "Time! Effort! Money! Care! If you're not worth it then they won't bother with you! And I want to be worth something! Do you know how many people cracked?! How many couldn't stand up to expectations? They were forgotten about, tossed aside the second they failed!"

That…was pretty much exactly what B made the orphanage sound like, even if Mello wasn't referencing the place directly. Even if B had been convincing, Light had held out a little on believing it. He knew L was messed up but he didn't want to acknowledge that L had been hurting children. It had been easier to accept when he was hurting adults because Light also did that, but this…

Light felt sick. And in his mind, one phrase stood out more than any other. He never wanted to hear a young child say "I want to be worth something". Before that moment, Light hadn't seen Mello as a real, actual child. More like the child version of an old enemy, but…

Maybe if he hadn't turned over a new leaf, things would've been different. He might not have cared then about the stress Mello was under or what he might be going through. But he did. He felt certain at that moment that the world had failed these kids – that it had failed all of them – and he wanted the cycle to *end* .

He wanted it to end.

He *really* needed to talk to L about this at some point, but there was someone else he needed to figure out how to talk to first.

~ ❻ ~

“So what you’re telling me is,” Light started, rubbing his forehead as he felt an incoming headache. “That the king wants me to come to the Shinigami Realm personally to speak with him?”

“If you want to find out anything useful about that Beyond guy, yeah.” Ryuk said.

Light didn’t even bother to keep himself from groaning. At that moment, he and Ryuk were in the courtyard of his college campus. Light had left Ryuk a secret message in his notebook that they could talk about his visit back to their realm later. After all, he didn’t need Ryuk bringing it up at the hotel, where there were too many cameras and listening devices to speak freely, even when Light was ostensibly alone.

His college was just about the only place he could be alone these days and that was only because L seemed more than happy to drop the college student disguise the second he’d gotten what he wanted. He still couldn’t be seen talking to an invisible person in his classes, but the courtyard was viable as long as he was careful about it. It was an open area so there wasn’t anywhere close-by for someone to hide and listen in on their conversation. So they’d either be too far away to hear or they’d be out in the open and Light would see them. Both Light and Ryuk had also checked to make sure there hadn’t been any tracking devices stashed on him, so they were good to have that talk.

Except now that they’d had it, Light found that he was no closer to getting a handle on the Beyond Situation and now he also had a new problem to deal with. He needed to figure out when and how he could do something like *disappear off to the Shinigami Realm* . Light’s life was

so heavily regimented and he spent so little time alone these days that going off the grid for even a few hours posed a real problem. Light spent most of his days at the hotel of the week with L except for when he had classes on his campus that he got driven to and picked up from by Watari. Except for the brief visits to see his mom and sister, he spent the weekends with the investigation team, too.

Light closed his eyes and leaned back on the bench he was seated on, trying to think of where he could find the time to go and visit. Even if he chose a time when he was alone, he'd also have to make sure it was a time when he wouldn't be missed, either. If he skipped out on class to do it and word got out or he pretended he was visiting his sister and they figured out that was a lie, it would cause unnecessary suspicion and give L ammunition.

Light would have to figure something out. After muttering some of his thoughts to Ryuk, his friend got a big grin on his face. "Hey. What about that one idea—"

"No." Light cut him off before he could get too excited about that. "It's not time for that, yet." He didn't want it to be time for that yet. That plan that Ryuk was talking about…that was his nuclear option for if things *really* went pear-shaped. It was the thing that would ostensibly remove him as a viable suspect if he found himself in a real bad situation.

Arguably, it was this life's equivalent to the Hail Mary that giving up ownership of the Death Note had been in his first life. It was just… very extreme. He knew that it would cause his friends and family a lot of worry. It could even be traumatic for them like his sister's kidnapping was. He really didn't want to pull the trigger on that plan unless he had to, even if Ryuk was excited to see how it played out.

And L…Well, Light didn't have the slightest clue how L would react to that plan, although he did have his hopes.

“Aw, but it would be *so* entertaining. You know it would be.” Ryuk complained at him.

“I wonder what the king has to tell me that he didn’t want to tell you.” Light moved to another topic, pointedly ignoring Ryuk’s “logic”. Ryuk went along with it willingly enough.

“I don’t know what the old man thinks about half the time! He doesn’t talk to us often. Don’t know *why* . He just hides away and does nothing like the rest of us!”

“You really should show the king more respect, Ryuk.” Light said, moderately. It was a discussion they’d had a few times in his previous life when he didn’t have his human memories.

“Oh, don’t start on that again.” Ryuk groaned. “So what if he’s the oldest of us? What’s he done in the last thousand years that deserves respect? Not much of a king.” Ryuk shrugged, carelessly.

“But he’s the only one we have.” Light returned.

“For now.” Ryuk said pointedly, shooting Light a wide grin. “And I’ll bet the fact that you’re probably the only one of us that still respects him is why you’re his favorite!”

“Well, it can’t hurt.” Light smirked back.

After a few seconds, the smile slid off his face as he grew contemplative once more. “Seriously though, I wonder what the big

deal about Beyond is. If he'd just made a deal with another Shinigami for their eyes, the king shouldn't have any problem saying so…and I wouldn't be able to see his death date. Both those things make me lend credence to his claim that he's been like this since he was a kid."

"Right, as usual, Light-o!" Ryuk chuckled. "He doesn't show any signs of having made a deal, so unless there's something even weirder that we don't know about, he didn't get them the usual way."

Light sighed. He fidgeted with the watch on his wrist. It was basically the same as the one he used to use that had a hidden compartment with a piece of the Death Note hidden inside. Except instead of a pin to write in his own blood, he'd hidden a shard of pencil led to write with. He'd taken to wearing it ever since his meeting with B, though he hoped he wouldn't have to relive that particular blast from the past.

This whole thing made him uneasy. Regardless, he probably wasn't going to find out why Beyond had the eyes until he went and asked the king himself, which made doing so as soon as possible very important. He just had to figure out a way to make it work and hope that whatever was so important that he couldn't tell an ordinary Shinigami like Ryuk was something he could actually use against B.

Because right now, Beyond was the biggest unknown in Light's world.

~ ❶ ~

L had found clarity, for what felt like the first time in a long time.

His relationship with Light didn't matter, it'd never mattered. He had gotten sucked into Light's game and he'd started trying to play a role

he was never meant for. He'd woken up to look around himself and realized that the stage was no longer his.

But he had a plan to turn back the clock. To undo everything Light had done to him, everything he'd tricked L into believing he needed or wanted. Their relationship was a complication in an already overly convoluted case. An unnecessary diversion from the case that L had somehow allowed himself to believe he wanted. He didn't need any foolish relationships. He didn't need any *distractions* .

All he needed were challenges to entertain himself and break up the monotony of life. And right now? What he *needed* was to finish the Kira Case. His prestige was on the line! His reputation as an investigator was inches away from being *ruined.* When had he stopped caring about that?

He was the man who'd been solving cases remotely since he was a teenager. He'd battled the two other best detectives in the world so he could hold the top *three* spots! Not that anyone knew that besides Watari.

L…

L was the greatest detective in existence. He wasn't—he couldn't be led astray by Kira. By Light. L had come up with a plan to finally get control. He needed to go back on the offensive, like he'd done when he'd first started their battle while learning from his mistakes. Confronting Light during that news broadcast told him that if he gave Kira any opportunity to do so, he wouldn't exploit public perception of L to turn the world even further against him.

Opposing and investigating Light outright throughout the case taught L that it was an express ticket to being labeled "the bad guy". Normally, he didn't have to care about those things. What other

people thought had never mattered, the results spoke for themselves. But in this case he'd been forced to acknowledge that it did matter. The thing that had made his first official confrontation with Kira such a failure was Kira weaponizing public opinion to boost his own reputation while pulling L's down.

L could argue that he couldn't have anticipated Kira immediately taking their battle into the realm of public opinion. Much as Kira's still unexplainable knowledge of Tailor's true identity and arrest had been completely unforeseeable. However, his negligence in not considering that route when having their battle through a live broadcast and his failure to adapt quickly enough afterwards was truly abysmal.

On a technical level, L had succeeded in everything he'd been trying to accomplish with holding the broadcast in the first place. He'd wanted to prove Kira could kill without being present. He'd done that. He wanted to prove Kira was in Japan and where in Japan he was. He'd done that. He'd wanted to prove that Kira would kill anyone who tried to catch them, even if they were innocent…so he'd accomplished two out of three goals, that wasn't bad.

And yet the broadcast was viewed almost unanimously by the public and by L himself as Kira's win. The reason was clear. Even if L had successfully proven Kira's location and abilities, the killer had made it clear that L was only able to do that because *Kira allowed it* . Kira had made it a point to announce that they knew Taylor was a criminal and that L *planned* to have him die at some point during that broadcast.

Kira could have easily just ignored the obvious bait, but he *didn't* . Because it was worse for L if Taylor died.

Because of what Kira said – through Taylor – it could be and was argued online that L killed Tailor as much as Kira did. He was the one to set up the broadcast, to plaster his name all over it, and to use him to bait out a known killer. A little over half a year ago, L's name had barely been known to anyone outside of Interpol. Now, he was known

to anyone with access to a TV or a computer *and* he was known as a killer, if indirectly.

After all, the man wouldn't have died if he hadn't placed him directly in Kira's path. This, Light revealed in just a few short words from Tailor's mouth, utilizing knowledge about both Tailor's situation and L's motives that he shouldn't have had. And in so doing, Kira also "proved" some kind of omnipotence to the greater public.

L did not, nor would he ever believe, that Kira had foreknowledge of all things. He *could* believe that Kira could kill with apparently supernatural powers – of course, he had to see it with his own eyes first – but he could never accept the completely ludicrous idea that Kira was omnipotent. Kira was human. Of that, L was certain. One using strong telepathic abilities or something of that ilk, L was also certain.

What was causing him problems – as much as L loathed to think it – was what the public believed. In one fell swoop, Kira had painted himself as a God of Truth against the manipulative L, an all-knowing deity, and – bizarrely – a kind soul, putting Tailor out of his misery because the man had been set up to die by none other than the *villainous* L. Kira was the good guy trying to right the wrongs of the system and L was the bad guy, upholding the crooked system using equally crooked methods.

And L had been on the backfoot ever since. But he wouldn't tolerate it anymore.

He'd allowed working with the investigative team to soften him and his methods. The methods he knew *worked* . He'd allowed Light to soften him. Part of Light's plan, most likely.

But L had never lost a case and he wasn't going to just throw that

away for Light. He didn't need Light or the JPD. He was fine on his own. He always had been. He'd always been alone and he'd never once felt loneliness. Why fix something that wasn't broken?

L couldn't fight Light directly. He'd just be ostracized further from the group and nothing would come of it. Besides, he'd learned that in verbal arguments, Light always won. Always won people over or flummoxed L, leaving his original motive for the conversation unfulfilled.

L would have to go the indirect route with this and B could be useful in accomplishing that.

B liked to think himself clever but L was always there keeping pace beside him. He wanted to be ahead of L, to beat him. And he'd already made a move on Light, likely with the same motive in mind.

Of course, B might just have wanted to learn from Light about how to best the Great L, L thought scathingly. But L had to admit that the more likely scenarios were that B had either figured out that Light was Kira or was making attempts on LIght because of their relationship. Perhaps both. The fact that he made his move during one of their dates was suggestive.

At any rate, L had bested B before when he played this little game of his. His little bid for attention. B had likely learned from that last encounter and wouldn't do the exact same thing here, but L knew B well by this point. After all of the tests he took at Wammy's House meant to measure his mental acuity and, at times, put stress on it.

After all of the reports L got on how B and the other more promising students were performing, he knew B's thought process very well. In LA, he'd known B's plan from the very beginning and the only troublesome matter was tracking him down before its completion.

He wanted to beat L and the best way to do that was to either solve the Kira Case before L could or render it unsolvable. Whichever method he'd chosen, he'd already started targeting Light. L had a plan to bait B into doing something drastic using Light, who would in turn be baited by B to do something even more drastic with no preparation.

If B were to get information about where their team was staying one day – L would pave the way for him, of course – and targeted one of their investigators to compel Light to give himself up in return for their safety, Light almost certainly wouldn't put himself in that level of danger. Light could take some calculated risks when he had the upper hand, but that was a few leagues too far for L to believe the boy would willingly do. But L also knew well by now that Light was irritatingly soft-hearted. He wouldn't leave one of their own to get hurt when there was something he could do to stop it and, of course, there was.

He could kill B.

The Light L knew wouldn't put himself in such a dangerous position but he also wouldn't leave one of their own to get hurt in his stead and being put in that impossible position would push him to the extreme. To force him to kill without planning ahead of time. If there was any chance in this world of catching Kira slipping and actually *seeing* how they kill, it would be at that moment. But for extra assurance that Light would pull the trigger – so to speak – L planned to stack the deck so that it was *Matsuda* who was threatened. Light had an unusually close friendship with him and if the worse happened and he died, being deprived of Matsuda in the investigation was no great loss. If nothing else, even if Light could kill entirely without visual cues, the localized nature would prove to everyone once and for all that Kira *was* on the investigative team.

And who was more likely to kill impulsively for Matsuda, him or Light?

He'd get B taken care of and put Light in the most compromising position yet. He could be assured that there were no barriers for Light to do it, since B had been truly unhinged enough to tell Light his real name, something they'd drilled into the children at Wammy's to *never* do. Meanwhile, L could be assured of B's actions, as well. The man had killed multiple innocents before in his bid to beat L, what was one more? If B thought he could kill Light directly, he would've tried doing so when he had Light alone and convinced *he* was L.

So if he was committed to this, his best bet was threatening someone else so that Light would put himself at a disadvantage and therefore, become easier to take on than he would be normally. It was exactly what L would do himself, sans telling anyone his real name.

L was aware that B could only have some of the information he seemed to have if he'd somehow managed to hack their computer systems. L found himself impressed by that, but more importantly he could use that to feed B information to get the reaction he wanted. if the whole affair worked out just half the way he expected it to, L could checkmate both of them in one move.

And maybe then Light Yagami would stop taking up space in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

I'll leave it up to your discretion on whether Light is including himself when he says that the world failed "all of them". I really like it when I can have my characters make observations that really lean into the unreliable narrator angle. In L's case, it's really nice writing him spiraling in his head, convincing himself that his budding relationship with Light needs to end.

Also! The crazy thing is next chapter. It's almost upon us...I'm so excited!

The Double Kidnapping Gambit

Chapter Summary

> Light and L get into an argument, Kira Kills on Kamera, Mello gets in and out of some shit, and there are two - count 'em, two - kidnappings.

Chapter Notes

> Hey! Sorry it took a while longer to get this one out! I've been dealing with a LOT of unrelated stress in my personal life and I was taking a mental health break to give myself some TLC. I decided to prioritize managing my stress levels and write this chapter in small spurts, instead. But I'm back now, the chapter is up, and I'm feeling a lot better than I was!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light didn't like the way things had been between him and L the last few days. Ever since the run-in with B, their relationship had been changed. He couldn't tell exactly how it had changed, he just felt that it had.

L had always been suspicious of him so it wasn't like that had changed. The creeping suspicion that L was planning something had begun to rise.

L was an observer by nature. When he was planning something, he got even quieter than normal so he could observe more. So Light was playing the Figure Out What L Is Planning game, meanwhile he was still working through his feelings about the latest things he'd learned about L. About the orphanage. He…really didn't know anything about L's past. It hadn't bothered him since L died in the first life, but suddenly it felt like a huge blind spot in his knowledge. An ominous black hole.

Light had *thought* that he didn't care about L's past because he knew who L was as a person and he'd be a hypocrite to judge someone

based on their past. But this wasn't L's past, was it? It was something he had done and was still doing. And he would never have expected L's activities to include…

Light…Light couldn't help but be angry at L. Hurting *children* . It was evident from B's monologue and Mello's breakdown that this was full-on abuse. If B was to be believed, children have even *died* as a result of it. And for *what?* To "create" the next L? To give the world another detective? It was beyond the pale and Light felt violently sick.

He thought about Near, about the kid who'd never seemed to enjoy anything in life despite being so young. The kid who was never allowed to be a kid. The kid he wasn't sure ever smiled. He even thought of Mello, who had clear anger issues and lacked emotional control. Who Light could not see was desperate to prove himself and had severe self-worth issues.

He considered how both kids didn't act like they knew how it felt to be cared for. Near's confusion. Mello's abrasiveness. It all made sense if these kids were used to taking care of themselves. Light didn't even know how many kids' lives they messed up like this, but B was closer to L's age by appearance, which implied they'd been doing this a long time and a whole orphanage dedicated to this suggested a *lot* of kids going through it at once.

He was just so disgusted and even though he argued to himself that he knew L was not a good person, kids made it different. Children have done nothing wrong, have harmed no one. It was the opposite of everything Light had ever wanted for the world, even at his worst.

By his own definition…L would be a criminal. The kind of person Light investigated and then made an example of…the kind of person *L* investigated. Wasn't that what was meant by the phrase "stare too long into the abyss and the abyss looks back"? Study something too long and you become it. It'd happened to Light in the past and now he could see it happened to L both then and now.

But he'd never consider hurting L, no matter what he's done, which already made him a hypocrite. So Light had been stuck like that for the last few days, unsure of what his next step would be. He wanted to have the kind of relationship with L where he could sit down and ask him about it and L would tell him the truth…but they didn't have a relationship like that yet. Certainly didn't feel like they did, right now.

Maybe it was that thought that made Light sit down next to L after what felt like ages of tiptoeing around each other and making the rest of the investigative team uncomfortable. He'd sidestepped Naomi's attempt to ask him what happened with L, but he really did want to talk to him.

He noticed L twitch as he sat down next to him at his computer setup but he didn't say anything and Light ignored it in favor of starting the hard conversation. "B told me about the orphanage." L made a strange choking sound under his breath and his eyes darted up to Light's. Light took a breath. There was a reason he'd chosen to just come straight out with it and it wasn't just because he knew L preferred things without fluff. He wouldn't let himself back out of it. "It's true, isn't it?" It wasn't a question, not really. Because if he phrased it as a question, L would probably lie to him about it.

L didn't respond, just saying nothing and staring at Light with that calculating gleam in his eyes.

Light shoved down his annoyance and started again. "L, you have to stop it. What you're doing is wrong."

That got a reaction. "Is that what's finally gotten you to break your silence towards me? You want to condemn the idea of the orphanage that B has told you?" There was something derisive barely hiding under L's tone. Possibly only Light would have been able to pick up on it.

With practiced control, Light once again shoved down his annoyance. "What I *want* is the truth, but I know I'm not going to get that from you." Light took a shallow breath. "L, I shouldn't have to explain this to you, but hurting children is *wrong.* "

This got another twitch from L. "Is that what it seems like to you? Us hurting children? I can assure you, Light, that your view of our establishment is skewed. We do not hurt the children in our care, we provide them with the education necessary to make good use of their special talents. Other orphanages don't have our connections. We provide the children with better futures than they could've otherwise hoped to have."

"The ones that survive." Light couldn't help himself from sniping.

L's hand tightened on his knee, his pale knuckles almost going white. "...I presume that came from B, as well?"

"This isn't about B." Light sidestepped the question. "This is about how flimsy your argument about helping those kids really is. Is this really considered helping to you, L? Throwing kids into dangerous cases where they could get killed? Working them to the mental breaking point and then past that? One kid has already died, haven't they? And not even on a case." Light paused, casting an angry glance at L as he voiced the thought that had been slowly driving him crazy since he learned about this from B. "Or…is it not only one kid that died from this? Were there others?"

L didn't answer him and as the seconds ticked by, Light lost his calm. "L! This isn't a game! These are children you're toying with!"

His explosion caused the others in the room to turn their attention to

the pair, finally tuning into their whispered conversation. Seeing all of their eyes on them, Light had the brief thought of dragging this all out into the open in front of everyone, lambasting L in front of everyone and tarnishing his reputation beyond repair with the truth of what he's been doing to have successors like Near and Mello.

The group still wasn't happy with having a child on the team, in general, even if they could agree he was mature for his age. Light was sure that all it would take is the knowledge of how someone like Near came to be to firmly make L the bad guy in the group's eyes. The child abuser.

But as Light glanced back at L and saw how he'd tensed up in response to everyone's attention focusing on their conversation, Light felt an unfortunate *pang* in his heart.

Damn it , Light seethed in his mind. Forcing a stiff smile, he turned back to the rest of the team. "Sorry, guys. Got a little loud, there. We were practicing having a fight in case we needed to pretend to have a rift form in the team. I got a little too into it, we'll try to keep it down." And he turned his back to the team, going back to L and hoping that they bought it.

L was peering at him again and Light really couldn't categorize the look in there. He was still angry enough to brush it off for the moment, anyway. "Children's lives are not games, L." Light made sure to whisper it this time, but his tone still carried how much anger he felt over this. Why couldn't L see that?

L spent several long seconds in silence but this time, he seemed to be contemplating what he was going to say, so Light allowed it. Finally, L said, "It's all for the greater good. I'm the greatest detective in the world for a reason. No one has matched me before or ever will again, but one day I'll die. Likely in the course of a case." The thought that it would likely be during the Kira case remained unspoken. "It is essential that someone else be prepared to step up and take my

place."

"Why? Why is it essential?" Light asked, with frustration.

"Come again?" L blinked in surprise.

"You heard me: why is it essential? The world has plenty of police officers and detectives, though they aren't nearly as good as you. More than that, the world survived just fine before your arrival on the scene. Don't act like you were born in a post-apocalyptic wasteland." Light said. "I don't want to think about you dying, but if you did, the world would not crumble to ruin without another World's Best Detective. But these children's lives could be utterly destroyed. What kind of trauma do you think you've inflicted on them? And for what? To create another great detective the world doesn't need?"

"Are you saying that because you're Kira?" As soon as the words were out of L's mouth, Light felt his blood pressure skyrocket.

"Excuse me?" Light asked in a deadly calm tone, the Death God that he was starting to leak through a little. "Is that how you're going to take my words? Ignore my viewpoint the way you always do? Write whatever I say off as a manipulation by Kira so that you don't have to take anything I say seriously? Screw you, L." He said with genuine venom.

L looked taken aback by his reaction, even going so far as to lean back a little in his chair. "I…I didn't mean it that way, Light."

"Really? Because it sure sounds like you meant it *exactly* the way it sounded." Light shot back. "If I'm Kira, then you don't have to listen to a damn thing I say. Isn't that right?"

“I…” L seemed to be at a loss for words. “It’s not that I’m trying to undermine your words.”

“Well, I feel undermined.” Light said. “Do you even feel guilty? At all? You’re perpetuating a system that’s costing children their sanity and sometimes their lives. Do you feel nothing at all about that?”

“That’s a difficult and unfair question.” L replied.

“No, what you’ve been doing to those kids is unfair. It’s not unfair to call you out on it. Someone should’ve done it earlier.” Light shot back, firmly. He couldn’t stay here anymore. He couldn’t talk about this anymore. It was clear that L didn’t feel any guilt over what he was doing and Light felt sick to think about it.

He couldn’t finish the conversation. “I wish you would open up for *once* . To me, to *anyone* . Because right now, all I know is that you’ve abused children under some stupid idea of there needing to be another L and you won’t explain yourself more than that. It isn’t cutting it, L. And I don’t have to sit here and keep pounding against a brick wall.”

“Light…” L started, holding up a hand. Light didn’t know what he was going to say but it didn’t matter to him right then. He pointedly pushed himself up from his chair and walked away heading for the door. He needed space. He needed air.

“Light.” The voice that stopped him in his tracks wasn’t L’s, it was Near. His name was said so very quietly but given that Near had apparently waited until Light had just been walking past him, he heard it clearly.

Hearing Near speak was just the thing he needed to slice through his anger. Taking a calming breath, Light turned to look down at the boy playing with his toys on the floor. The boy wasn't looking at him and yet Light got the strong feeling that he had his complete attention.

"Yeah?" Light asked, softly.

"Are you and Ryuzaki arguing because of me?" There was no emotion in Near's voice as he asked, but Light's stomach dropped at the question. If anything, the lack of emotion in his voice forced Light to come to his own conclusions about what Near was feeling right then. He wouldn't have asked if he didn't care.

Light quickly ran through what the rest of the group might've heard and then cursed inwardly. The only part that Near might've heard was the part where Light had yelled about L toying with children's lives. Of course.

Light quickly reached out and grabbed Near's hand gently, holding the child's cold hand in his larger, warmer one. "No, no. We were just acting, we weren't arguing for real." He forced another smile.

Near looked up at him for a beat and then, "I don't believe that."

Light barked out a laugh. "As well you shouldn't." He shook his head, fondly. "But it's alright. We're mad at each other right now but it doesn't have to stay that way. People argue sometimes, that's all. Rough patches don't have to stay rough. Do you understand?"

Near seemed to think about it and then nodded. "Are you still going to leave, then?"

Light sucked in a quiet breath. Ah, these kids were getting to him… “I can stay for a little while longer.” He forced himself to say, squeezing Near’s hand before letting go and decisively walking back to the chair next to L and taking a seat.

“I thought you were going to leave.” L said, quietly.

“Don’t talk to me. I’m still mad at you.” Light pouted, glancing away from the detective. Light didn’t know what kind of childhood Near’d had so far - if you could even call it a childhood - but he didn’t like what he’d seen of it so far. The last thing the kid needed was to see the adults in his life fighting like children, especially if he thought it was about himself. Not untrue, but he didn’t need to put that on the kid.

L looked like he was going to say something anyway, regardless of Light saying he didn’t want to talk anymore, when suddenly L’s computer lit up and started ringing, instantly drawing both L and Light’s attention. He was being video called from an unknown source. While Light was staring at the call in confusion, he caught L glancing at Touta out of the corner of his eye, which confused him. Who was calling? Why had L glanced at Touta? Was L expecting this call or...?

From there, L reacted in an instant. “Everyone, be quiet.” He snapped. He put his foot on the side of Light’s swivel chair and shoved it so Light slid out of frame. As soon as Light was to the side, L’s spindly fingers flew across the keyboard and accepted the call. Light could still see the screen as the video turned on and the unmistakable form of B took up the screen.

“Hiya!” He greeted in an overly fake, cheerful tone. “L, it’s been ages! Last time we saw each other was in LA, wasn’t it?”

“How did you gain access to my secure line?” L inquired, calmly.

“Oh, I’ve been in your system for ages!” B crowed, waving it away. “I don’t mind admitting that, since you’re probably going to scrub your system after this, anyway.”

“And to what do I owe this impromptu video call?” L asked.

“I thought today would be a lovely day to try something is all!” B exclaimed. “You don’t need to sound so snippy. Are you perhaps still upset that I took Light out on a date the other day? Really, jealousy is unbecoming of you, L.” From the corner of his eyes, Light could see L grip his knee tightly. “I’d appreciate if you stated your business already. I’m very busy on a case.”

“Ah, yes, your obsession with catching Kira. I remember you had a hard-on for him. Speaking of which, where’s Light? Where are you hiding him? Jealousy isn’t very becoming, L. I have something he’d want to know about!” Curious about what he was talking about, Light slid back into frame. L’s foot shot out like he was going to push Light back out again, but Light grabbed onto the desk with a deathlike grip and shot him a challenging look.

“Oh, Light! There you are!” B greeted, as if him hiding just out of frame before was perfectly normal. “You look as adorable as ever! Looks like the case is treating you well.”

Light lets those comments roll off his back with a warm smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “It’s nice to see you, too. Your makeup looks as sloppily put together as the last time I saw you.” He expertly ignored the multiple set of eyes he could feel boring into his back from the rest of the team.

B laughed. “You’re a ray of sunshine, as usual. But! I have a surprise

for you that should put you in a better mood!" A chill went down Light's spine. His Impending Danger sense shot up a flag just before the image on the screen changed, switching from B to someone else. And Light's heart dropped at the sight of it.

In front of the camera was some guy Light didn't know, but in his arms and being held hostage was Mello. He had his arms tied behind his back and a blindfold on. The guy was holding a knife to his throat, both the knife and the watch on the man's arm glinting sharply. Mello was very clearly terrified, even with his eyes covered. Light felt his own features twist into the same kind of horror. What on Earth was happening? How did this..? It felt as if everything had gone crazy in the span of a second.

Then B's voice came back on over the footage, even as the camera remained fixed on the duo in front of it. "Guess who I caught when you-know-who wasn't paying attention! I feel like you know who this is, Light, and L *definitely* knows him."

Light was shooting forward and speaking into the microphone before L could even think about doing it himself. "What the hell do you think you're doing?! What are you playing at?" His voice sounded panicked, even to his own ears, but Light didn't have the capacity to police his voice at the moment.

Behind him, he heard someone cautiously step up to his shoulder to get a better look at what was going on. "That's…a kid…" Touta's concerned voice whispered in shock just behind him.

"I'm just having some fun." B's voice answered. "Like I said, there's something I want to try. I needed these four for it. This man – who will remain nameless for the time being – has graciously agreed to kill M for me and he's promised to do so even if I dropped dead right this minute. The boy's life is in *his* hands, not mine. Well, him and his little friend's, but we must pace ourselves with these things. Him first." B tutted.

As he spoke, Light found it harder and harder to breathe. So they'd roped the other little boy into this, too? He could've been in the same room, just off-screen, or he could've been in another room, then. If he was behind the camera, that might explain why the man was staring intently at something behind it. "Don't joke around like this. B, that's a *child* ." Light tried to reason with him.

"We were kids, too." B's voice said with a deadly seriousness before the faux playfulness returned. "In case you're wondering where he's looking, there's a clock on the wall he's watching. He's going to slit the little one's throat at exactly ten o'clock."

As one, Light and L's eyes flicked to the bottom corner of the laptop screen. Three minutes to ten. Light's eyes flicked back to the terrified form of Mello on the screen – who suddenly started struggling the moment B announced his time of death – before looking to L. L, who was silently watching the scene unfold, shock just barely visible in his eyes. Why wasn't L saying *anything* ? This kid was one of his, wasn't he? Wasn't L going to pull out of some kind of plan to save him?

…or was this going to be like Ide?

The thought spurred Light forward and he grabbed the mic again. "What are you going to achieve by doing this?" Light tried, beginning to feel somewhat desperate. "You can't actually think killing him will give you anything. Just let the kids go." Light gripped the table tightly. This guy was a real sicko.

But, his rational mind tried to pry through his burgeoning panic. *If there's anything I learned about him in our first and last encounter, there was a method to the madness.* And after a few precious seconds spent taking in the full situation, Light realized what it was. And then the clock switched over to 9:59 and he didn't have time to *think* . Light's gaze went to Mello again, the child struggling to tear himself out of an

adult man's grasp with a knife to his neck.

Was this guy actually going to go through with it? Could Light take that risk? In his mind's eye, he saw the boy crying on the floor of his hotel room. For once, seeing past the volcanic anger he hid behind. He couldn't *stop* seeing it!

"Why does it have to be Near? Every single time! It's always him and I'm sick of being leftovers!"

"If I come in second place one more time, I'm just useless."

"I want to be worth something!"

Light's heart thundered in his chest, nearly into his throat. No. He was just a child, just a *kid* . This wasn't right… *NO!*

Light pushed himself out of his chair so fast it shook the table.

"Light?!" Touta exclaimed, stumbling back several steps as Light pushed past him and practically threw himself into a corner of the room.

"I can't watch this!" He yelled back, curling up on himself.

Meanwhile, he was fumbling with his wrist watch, popping open the hidden compartment. The very watch he'd just started wearing again. The one that held so many bad memories for him, but now he was trying to do something *good* . He couldn't get the watch open quick

enough. He curled up even tighter into a ball, instinctively trying to hide what he was doing further as he scrambled. The pencil led shard was clenched tightly between his thumb and forefinger, his strongest thought in that moment was that the kid was dead if he dropped it.

The second hand on his watch was ticking but he refused to waste the time checking to see how many more seconds he had. Not yet.

He scrawled the name he'd seen above the knife wielding guy's hand, coming out legible if only just barely. He only just managed to keep from falling back into the instinct of writing the man's death as a heart attack and decided to put it down as a knife wound, instead. He glanced at his watch. Twenty seconds until ten. He could make it.

Feverishly, he wrote the time of death for the man. Set exactly for ten o'clock. His desire to save that stupid kid was making his thoughts hazy, but he kept enough of his sense to cover himself at least this much. With this method and timing, the Death Note would take care of the rest.

Only then did he glance back at the screen to watch what happened. He was at a distance, but he could see just enough to watch. Barely a handful of seconds passed before Light's watch switched to ten o'clock. It all happened in an instant.

Mello somehow managed to break free just as the man went to slit his throat and the swipe missed, resulting in a bad stab wound to the man's chest, instead. Light was grateful Mello's eyes were covered so he didn't have to witness that. Considering he wrote the man's time of death to be at ten exactly, Light wouldn't be surprised if the Death note had managed to make him stab himself in the heart. If Light had had more time, he would've specified that the guy would've received a stab wound at ten and died of it later in the hospital. But he didn't have more time and he'd already pulled the trigger.

And the room had fallen deathly silent.

No one spoke but soon – much too soon – the sound of clapping filled the silence, the sound originating from the computer. “Would you look at that? He’s dead. Now…I wonder if that was a simple accident or if *Kira* had something to do with it? You can have the boys back now. If you want them, that is. I’ll let them scamper off. But really, how lucky could a kid be to escape death like that?” B paused and the next words he spoke were very low and filled with a dark amusement. “No one’s that lucky.”

And then the call was ended.

~ ❶ ~

There were a few beats of silence where no one quite knew what to say or do and then in a burst of movement, Light got up and ran out of the room.

“W-Wait, Light!” Touta called out, making to run out after him before stopping himself quickly to assure the rest of them. “Light’s probably just startled. I’ll go check on him!” And then he ran out, following Light’s path down the hall.

L stayed where he was, stubbornly refusing to follow Light. He watched as Matsuda gave chase, going to comfort Light, and found that the knowledge tasted foul on his tongue.

He forced his own thoughts back to the case and the new information he’d just borne witness to that *should* be his number one priority at the moment, not whatever Light was feeling.

Because…Kira had just killed someone without knowing their name.

~ ❶ ~

He didn't even care how suspicious he was acting, he *needed* to get out of there. As soon as the call had ended, he'd torn out of the investigation room and beelined for his and L's.

He knew he'd made a mistake. He'd played right into B's hands. He'd realized that the guy wanted to goad him into killing on command, but he'd gone ahead and done it anyway. Which he didn't regret. He didn't think he regretted it.

He couldn't watch Mello be killed like that and just *let it happen* . Wasn't that the problem he had with the justice system, as it was? That it couldn't prevent enough crime, only react to it after the crime was committed? And if he let Mello die to keep himself clear of suspicion, wouldn't that be just like something his old self would've done? He could just *see* his old self engineering a situation just like that.

Ryuk tried to get his attention, asking if Light was alright and if there was anything he could do to help, but Light could barely process the fact that he was there as he went down a mental rabbit hole over what had just gone down.

But that begged the question: what did he do now? He'd knowingly played B's game to save the stupid kid and now…now his innocence was going to go right back into question again, wasn't it? Everything was too happenstantial – too timely – for most people to think Kira wasn't involved. After all, the only people who could've known about and reacted to that situation was someone in B's camp or their own. L was going to use this to try and sway the case in his favor again–

Wait, did L plan this? It was a stray thought that only flew by because of how convenient this would be for L's little team, Mello excluded. And yet…he couldn't entirely dismiss it. L *had* been acting strange beforehand and he hadn't done anything to stop the event. And Light had learned that he wasn't averse to harming children.

But is that really it? Light forcefully reasoned with himself. *That would require B to be willing to work with L when he's made his hatred of him quite clear…and I really don't want to believe that L would be willing to indirectly kill a child for a case, whatever else he might've done.* As his mind whirled in a semi-panic, he heard the door of the hotel room open and close as someone softly stepped further into the room behind him. He had just enough time to hope that it was L, even with everything going on between them, before hearing a soft voice speak.

"Light? Are you okay?" Touta asked, hesitantly placing his hand on Light's back. Turning around, Light was only greeted by a look of concern from his friend. The lack of judgment helped calm his tempestuous mind. Without thinking, Light reached forward and pulled him into a hug. Touta stood stiff in shock for a moment, before softening and returning the hug.

He couldn't fix whatever happened, he told himself. And he would need to find out more about how this whole thing happened, but that would take time. The important thing right now was that the pendulum was about to swing in Light's direction and if he didn't do something, L would take advantage of it. Light had to do something that would keep suspicion off his back for the moment, especially because it had just gotten a lot harder for him to find a time to sneak off and speak to the Shinigami King. Ryuk's suggestion of using *that* plan suddenly sounded like his only real option.

As Light looked at Ryuk hovering over Touta's shoulder, his eyes narrowed slightly and he mouthed, "Let's do it."

The only thing I can do, Light thought as he thought about the desperate plan he'd made with Ryuk a while back. *Is the thing I'm best at: creating chaos.*

~ ❶ ~

"Today is the day." Light murmured under his breath, barely a whisper. Ryuk, who was hovering very low and close to Light - as they had agreed on earlier - was able to hear it.

"Looks like it. You ready?" Ryuk asked.

"Always ready for some chaos." Light smiled broadly, keeping his head down so his hair curtained his face. No one was around them but he wanted to be sure the cameras didn't catch anything. At least, not the ones that were left. Then after a moment, a tinge of sadness crept in and his face drooped a little.

"What's that about, huh? You upset about something?" Ryuk asked, worriedly. He didn't want Light to do this while he was upset about something.

"I'm not upset about anything in particular. Don't worry, I'm ready for this." Light gave a shallow smile. "It's just that I hope L worries for me."

"Hm?" Ryuk cocked his head to the side.

"I'm just wondering if L will worry for me once our newest plan becomes known. I can't help but wonder if he will. I'm still so, so mad at him and we have a lot to talk about…but even so…" Light stopped,

closed his eyes, and sighed. Starting again, he said, “Whether it’s because he only sees me as an interesting project or if he assumes I’ll be fine because he figures out that I planned all of this…he could not be worried, right? It’s not a big deal if he isn’t, it’s not like that’s the goal of this or anything.” Light lowered his head even further so that his bangs hung over his eyes, blocking them from even Ryuk. “I suppose it doesn’t matter if he cares.”

“Hey, c’mon Light-o.” Ryuk swooped around him. “It’s not wrong for you to want the guy you like to be worried about you, especially with what we’re gonna do. I’m sure he’ll care.” The other Shinigami rested a giant, clawed hand on his shoulder. The next words he spoke were in a decidedly more cheerful tone. “Hey! How about we give this our all, make it our best performance! We’ll make sure your guy comes to save you!”

Light smile became more genuine at his friend’s proclamation. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of the alleyway coming up, the one they’d agreed to stage his abduction at. The young man felt no apprehension, just peaceful and warm.

No matter what happened, his friend would be with him to the end and past it. “Alright. Yeah, let’s do it.” He smiled, happily. They would do this together.

Ryuk didn’t reply, but the Shinigami’s grin grew wide, showing off all of his pointy teeth. He slithered from the air above Light to his side, by the entrance to the alleyway. Light forced himself not to prepare for the surge of motion, he wanted it to look real. He felt the long clawed fingers wrap around his arm and then with a hard, superhuman tug, Light was pulled into the alleyway.

~ ❶ ~

It was a few days after the…incident…with B and L was attempting to not question his own actions. He'd made the objectively correct decision. It was the correct course of action in order to corner Light, albeit he made a miscalculation. He hadn't considered that B would target his successors rather than one of the members of the JPD.

He'd surmised beforehand that B had gained access to his systems and had likely done so a while ago, given that the first person on the team he'd directly targeted was Light. It would make sense only if he had access to information about the case that wasn't public knowledge.

All the children at Wammy's House knew how to hack and B had been the best of them all. In truth, L was only surprised that B managed to hack *his* systems, as L had set them up himself. It either proved that L had been *very* distracted during this case or it proved just how capable B was.

L preferred the latter scenario.

Rather than lock B out, however, L chose to use this for his plan to corner Light. B was infamous for his animosity towards L, so he would be severely unlikely to help L intentionally, which was why L made use of B's presence in their system. L had created documentation of a plan to pressure Light into killing in a situation where the only ones present were members of the task force.

The base idea of the plan was true, but the details were obviously fabricated and ultimately inconsequential, only meant to introduce the idea to B and to give him the "opportunity" ahead of time to foil L's plan by taking it over for himself. After all, assuming he and Light weren't working together now, both L and B wanted to put Kira on the defensive.

Additionally, he'd made note in several places in the plan the danger

Matsuda posed to any plan against Light, accentuating his closeness with Light and all the way he'd noticed their comradery. He'd even gone so far as to insinuate that Matsuda may be in league with Kira if Light was indeed guilty (he was). It was a made-up charge, but one that would turn Matsuda into an even more attractive target for B to get at Light.

B had indeed gone ahead with it as L had been waiting for him to do, but the route he had taken had L completely off-guard. L had entertained the possibility of B targeting someone else on the team – perhaps Light's father even though the chief was a much more difficult target – and it was, of course, a strong possibility that B wouldn't act, at all. Instead, he might wait to see how L's plan worked out or he could have smelt a rat, so to speak, and ignored L's baiting.

He hadn't even *considered* that B might've worked his way so deeply into their systems that he'd found Matt and Mello's separate headquarters and then targeted *them* instead of Matsuda. It came completely out of nowhere in L's view and, at first, he didn't understand why B had made the decision to do so. Light had no connection to his successors outside of Near besides them sneaking into his home and then when Watari informed him that Mello went into his and Light's shared hotel room. If anything, Light would be free of their pestering if B chose to get rid of them.

It certainly wouldn't hold a candle to the kind of reaction B would get if he were to hold one of Light's friends or family hostage.

And then Light had started to get upset and it *struck* L.

Light had a notable fondness for children. Even if Light was a righteous person, that may not be enough on its own to push him into putting himself in the line of fire on a stranger's behalf. He was a very intelligent young man, after all. However, if the victim was a *child* , Light was more likely to intervene, given the behaviors he'd displayed thus far.

And children made for a much easier target than even Matsuda, who lacked any of the capabilities of a proper officer of the law. Especially *these* children. Loathe as he was to admit it, Matt and Mello had been largely unprotected. Both boys had firearms and the training to use them, but their greatest protection – like L – was their anonymity and the secrecy of their base of operations.

In the event that those were compromised, they were at risk but unlike L, who had both Watari and a group of officers here continuously and who himself was trained in hand-to-hand combat, his successors were far more open to a surprise attack. The details of which he'd interrogated both boys about as soon as they'd made their way back to their own base after being released.

While he could tell they were holding some information back, he judged it to be nothing of substance. The story they told him was that Matt had gone outside their hotel and been attacked and apprehended. They then used him to lure Mello and took him, as well.

B going after his successors – individuals that, if anything, were far closer to L than they were to Light – was a completely unexpected move. B using a proxy to pose as the real threat to the boy's lives was something L truly should've anticipated. It had been a massive oversight on his part.

Of course, since B had given Light his name, he wouldn't want to put himself on the line to goad Light into action. L felt frustrated with himself that he didn't expect a proxy. He'd expected B to do *something* to try and keep himself safe. It was simply that he hadn't expected B to have the resources to find someone willing to commit such an act for him. He'd always acted alone before so he lacked a personal network and after his arrest, any funds he'd gained had been confiscated.

How he would have obtained someone willing to murder a child with neither connections nor assets to aid him left L befuddled. Why B chose someone Light didn't know to do the act also did not make sense to L on a tactical level. Without knowing a person's name, Kira couldn't kill. Under those conditions, Mello would die and Light would be no worse off than he started.

If what B wanted was just to kill two of L's successors and set the case back, he didn't need to cause such a spectacle to do it or go to the trouble of involving an unknown third party to commit the murders. L had spent the whole call asking himself why B chose L's successors over Matsuda – who continued to be useless, even in *this* – and thinking about how poorly this had all gone.

Even if Light wanted to, he wouldn't be able to kill the man holding his successors hostage. His successors would die and this whole thing would be a miserable failure for both L and B. He hadn't a clue just what on Earth made B think this method would work.

Except…it seemed B's end goal hadn't been the same as L's. L had been attempting to witness Light kill in real time and to prove to the taskforce that Kira was one of them, even if it didn't prove without a doubt that that person was Light.

B…L couldn't even begin to approach understanding how B had come to the conclusion that Kira could kill without a name, but if that was what he'd been testing for then not only did his actions suddenly make perfect sense…but it had been a perfect success. Unlike L, who was stewing in failure.

Kira – Light – *had* killed despite having no possible way of knowing that man's name. L was sure it was Kira, despite the death not being due to a heart attack.

Was it a new ability that had evolved during the case or was it one he'd always had? The second option was his worst nightmare and it brought up the question of if Kira had other abilities that L hadn't been aware of.

The question of Kira's omnipotence that the more foolish members of the public seemed to believe he had came back to mind. Now, even L couldn't stop the doubts from creeping in. Especially with that comment Light made about establishing a permanent HQ. That was a plan that L himself had been secretly preparing for since before he joined the investigation and it sent shivers down his spine that Light brought it up the way he had. It was almost like he knew something.

Was Kira even human?

L shook away the idea, immediately.

He, of course, reviewed the footage they had of the hotel room at the time of the incident. He wasn't above taking advantage of what they managed to get from it. L found Light choosing to curl up and hide in a corner during the altercation suspicious. It was a childish thing to do for someone so chronically mature. And he had never shied away from conflict before. L had viewed the footage repeatedly, from multiple angles, zoomed in and out, and he'd been able to observe that Light seemed to be fiddling with something.

His legs and hunched form frustratingly blocked most of it from view, but that information on its own was still incredibly useful to L. He couldn't imagine Light choosing to do that for no reason; it had to be related. It had to have something to do with how he killed and if so, that meant there were physical signs. Previously, L had considered Light could kill without any outward signs, both physically and emotionally. That Light could kill only with the power of his mind, like a particularly powerful Esper. If Light had a physical tell – and a rather obvious one if his attempts to hide it were any indication – then that changed quite a lot.

Everything about the incident changed things.

L had already been confronted with enough of his oversights and failings during this case, he hardly needed any more. If L had missed *that* …maybe he was better off retiring. L forcefully shook off the thought. No, he wouldn't back down. Not for anything, not even for Light. Light, who had been cold and distant towards him in the few days since the incident. The incident, in itself, occurred after several days of Light not talking to him and after the argument they'd had about Wammy's House.

L wasn't bothered by that.

It certainly made the case easier for L. Light had ceased his annoying attempts to get close to him, so he could focus on actually solving the case and catching Light. It should stop the waters from muddying even further. So what if Light's sudden distance was even more distracting? So what if L had spent more time puzzling over if Light was being standoffish because he'd figured out L's role in the incident than he spent thinking about how Light had committed his most recent murder. It shouldn't matter to him how disappointed in him Light had sounded when they'd argued about L sponsoring the orphanage. This is what was necessary.

L stared listlessly at the time on the bottom of his laptop screen. Light was away at the moment, attending his college classes and, as usual, L was awaiting his arrival. He was becoming slightly agitated, in fact. Light was 44 minutes late. That was unusual for Light and even more so for Watari, who had taken to picking Light up from his classes in order to bring him to their current hotel. Officially, it was so that Light wasn't tailed to their location by Kira – or B, now. Unofficially, Light couldn't be left to his own devices for long or who knew what he was going to do next?

Letting Kira out of his sight for long periods was completely inadvisable. While L could no longer force Light to spend every night under watch and he couldn't do anything about the nights Light chose to stay at his family's home, he could at least insist that Light be escorted to the hotel from his campus under the guise of making sure he wasn't followed. Last night was one of those nights where he stayed at his family's home and then walked to his college before coming to L after his classes were over for the day. He often did that on the weekdays, but he always spent the full weekends at the hotel.

At any rate, a slight amount of tardiness was noteworthy for both Light and Watari, but it was not a cause for concern.

Over half an hour was not a small amount. Certainly not for two of the most punctual people on the team besides himself.

L had just made up his mind to call Watari when the man beat him to it. L answered his cell phone on the first ring.

"Ryuzaki," Watari started, indicating with the alias that he was making the call in a somewhat public area. "I apologize for the delay. I was awaiting Light's arrival outside of his school, but a substantial amount of time had passed and he hadn't exited through the gates. At first, I considered that he might be held back by something and wasn't concerned, but when he still didn't appear, I contacted his principal. According to their records of the day's attendance, Light hasn't shown up for any of his scheduled classes today. L, I'm afraid Light is missing."

Light is missing.

Light is missing.

The words rang repeatedly through L's mind. For a moment, all he could focus on were those words and then he burst into movement. "Come back immediately." He ordered.

"Understood." Watari hung up the second after he did, L spun around in his chair to face the others in the room. None of them had taken any particular interest in his phone call, not hearing anything alarming on his end.

"Chief Yagami," L said hurriedly, gaining the man's attention instantly. "This is very important. Have you heard from your son today?"

"No, I haven't." Soichiro Yagami said, looking at him with wide eyes (though not as large as his son's).

"Check your phone." L instructed him. The JPD members silenced their phones while they were at the hotel because L had told them that he found the noise distracting. Or he told them he did, anyway. If Light had tried to call or text his father, he might have missed it. L's own phone was never silenced. He wouldn't have missed it if Light had tried to call or text *him* .

The chief excitedly fumbled with his phone, pulling it out of his pocket and checking it. "No, nothing. Not a single missed call." He replied, sounding *very* worried now. He might not know what was going on yet, but he clearly picked up on enough to be worried about his son. As soon as he'd answered L, Soichiro was making a call. He simply listened for a while before pulling his phone away and looking down at it in frustration. "Light's not answering his phone."

"Call your wife." L told him. "Ask if Light left for school this morning." Soichiro hurried to do as he was told while L considered the situation.

Had Light run away? Was this a delayed response to what happened a few days ago? Had he been planning his escape route in the time since? Or could this whole thing be caused by something as simple as him feeling under the weather and forgetting to call his school? L adamantly refused to linger on his initial thought that Light might be in trouble and something had happened. He forcefully reminded himself that if Light could, in actuality, kill people without a name, then he could handle anyone who tried to cause him trouble. If anything, Light *was* the trouble.

Of course, even if Light *had* run away, L had no doubt that Light would find some way to explain his bolting in a way that seemed less guilty as sin after they found him. Even knowing that, nothing in existence would stop him from tracking Light down and bringing the brunette back with him. Light was fine. He was just pulling something again. Light was *fine* .

“Sachiko says Light left this morning for school, like usual.” Soichiro said, hanging up the phone.

Okay. That was fine…it only proved further that Light had made a run for it. That was the situation, L was sure of it. Even if he knew that B had targeted Light twice now and Light was now missing, it didn’t mean anything had happened this time except Light being Light. Just at that moment, L got a call from Watari telling him that he’d just arrived back at their hotel.

With a note of panic in his voice likely only detectable to himself and Watari, L informed him of what they’d found out so far and told him to come up to the meeting room immediately. It took until Watari had come all the way up to their floor for L to remember that he still wasn’t officially in charge of the investigation again, even if he was cleared of being Kira.

He'd been completely ignoring Near's presence. His dark eyes sought out the quiet boy, only to find himself being intensely watched by the child. Near was watching him with a calculating gleam in his eyes, seeming to have been doing so for some time. L pointedly ignored the look and whatever Near might've thought he saw that would make him look that way, instead giving Near a look of his own.

Near met his gaze steadily for a few seconds before opening his mouth. "Ryuzaki, would you mind telling me exactly what's got you and Chief Yagami so frazzled? It clearly has to do with Light." L chose to stay silent and allowed Watari to give them all a brief explanation of their struggle to locate Light while his mind flicked through possibilities.

"We need camera footage of the entire route Light took from his house to his school today. Since we have verification that he left home this morning, our next step is to find any street cameras that Light would've come across on his route and use that to attempt to trace where he went, since it's obvious he didn't go to school." Near concluded, when he'd heard what little information they had so far.

That was what found the team sitting in a semi-circle behind L and Near – who were sitting side-by-side – going through the footage provided by as many street and storefront cameras as they could find in a wide perimeter around Light's home. Aizawa and Naomi were the only ones not watching the camera, instead using a map of the area they'd printed out to mark where cameras had been destroyed. Because both Light's family home and his college were in slightly more upscale areas, they were able to acquire more cameras along the streets than L had been expecting…but less than he had hoped.

Something they found out when Watari reported back that he found both surprising and deeply concerning was that several cameras had been found destroyed, the timestamps on the surviving footage showing that they were all destroyed roughly twenty minutes before Light left his house and wasn't that peculiar? It left them with only the footage from those cameras up until they were destroyed, but strangely enough, none of them caught anything suspicious.

Looking at the map Aizawa and Matsuda had marked, the locations of the destroyed cameras looked almost random, scattered in a clump that had no defined path…if it weren't for the fact that the cameras looked like they had been destroyed by being *crushed* . With what, L could not yet hazard a guess, but he could comfortably say that it hadn't been done with a weapon like a bat or a crowbar.

Watari had brought back a few samples of the destroyed cameras and the indents on the crushed material almost looked like they'd been shattered by a hand gripping them but the proportions were all off. He would need to look into what could make indents similar to a hand, then. Combined with the size and force necessary to deliver that much damage.

Regardless, they easily found Light along the street shortly after starting his walk to school on what was presumably his usual route, but there were streets he took along the way that had few or no cameras, so they lost sight of him often. Some cameras were so far away that there was debate over whether the person in the video was even Light. L was used to this from his lifetime of working on cases, so it really shouldn't have bothered him as much as he found it did.

Light didn't seem to be behaving oddly in any way, albeit L could see frustratingly little of his expression through the cameras. It wasn't until roughly halfway through Light's trip that *something* happened.

L watched the grainy camera feed as Light's figure proceeded down the opposite street. L refused to blink as he watched the video and that was how he noticed when Light was yanked off-screen in an instant. If he'd blinked, he would've missed it.

Jolting in shock, L quickly glanced down at the timestamp on the bottom of the screen. Less than a second.

"Rewind the video and slow it down!" L barked out, in no mood to attempt to be civil.

“Make sure to slow down to a quarter of the speed. Half won't be enough.” Near added.

There was the clattering sound of someone grabbing the remote and then the video rewound. Whoever had the remote turned it back too far, but that just gave L the chance to take in the whole situation again. Frustratingly, he couldn't see much detail since the cameras were low-quality and the only one that caught anything was the one across the street from Light.

When the video got closer to the right timestamp, someone slowed it down to quarter speed. It still felt like it happened too quickly. Light proceeded down the street as he had been, then in the next moment and with no warning, he exited the frame, but the slower speed afforded them more detail.

There had been something even more unnatural about the way he disappeared from the video than just the speed at which he did it. Rather than taking a turn and exiting the screen of his own volition, Light had been dragged off his feet by an unknown assailant. The boy was quite simply jerked to the side…by someone so strong that he practically looked like he was lifted off the ground. Light's whole body jerked violently with the movement like a ragdoll and that was the last they saw of him.

The assailant remained completely unseen by the cameras. Try as he might, L couldn't make them out and zooming in on the footage as much as they were able didn't produce any more evidence. They couldn't see so much as a hand grabbing Light, despite the fact that they knew there had to have been.

L cursed about the angle and distance of the camera, thinking about all the ways the camera *could* have been placed to catch more information. Suddenly, his mind connected the location of this video with the other cameras that were destroyed. Looking down at the map and where this camera was located, L came to an awful realization.

One of the destroyed cameras was in the alley Light was dragged into, another on the opposite side of it, and more damaged cameras spawned from there. Whoever took Light had premeditated it and the cameras were destroyed to give the assailant an exit where they couldn't be tracked. Other cameras were likely destroyed as a diversion, so their escape path couldn't be determined.

Light…

Light had been kidnapped.

~ ❶ ~

"So," The Shinigami King rumbled, his voice carrying across the landscape even though he didn't raise his voice. His eyes peered at the pseudo-human standing before him. "I see you've finally come…to ask me about that little project of mine that seems to be causing you trouble."

Chapter End Notes

> So the "crazy thing" is actually two or more crazy things, if we're counting. That's Light blowing the lid on being able to kill without a name and him staging his own kidnapping afterwards. We can also arguably throw in Mello and Matt's brief abduction into the crazy, if we want. There's also some other minor stuff in here and the next few chapters aren't really going to stop with the

revelations, either, so…

Originally, I was going to make Light's abduction and the talk about B both get resolved in this chapter, as well. Buuuut, I realized that that would be a massive chapter that would take forever to get out and, more importantly, deescalate the situation way too fast. You guys can let me know if you prefer something like that and I can see about making the next chapter more like that, but I thought that Light's fake kidnapping and the fallout from it would be far more tension-filled if it wasn't over and done within a single chapter (albeit a very long one, this chapter on its own is almost 10,000 words). So the current plan is to stretch and sprinkle some of the additional crazy things I want to do along the next few chapters, all of it being fallout from this one.

A Conversation Beyond Death

Chapter Summary

> Light has his talk with the Shinigami King. B is Beyond being a problem. L has denial down to a science.

Chapter Notes

> WARNING: Discussion of stillbirths. The references are both vague and in the past, but be warned it's in there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His rapid heartbeat was just surprise.

He was just shocked that anyone could be successful in kidnapping Kira.

Light shouldn't have been so easily taken by anyone.

"L." Misora said calmly from right behind him. "Your hand."

L glanced down at his hand. It was gripping the desk very hard. Now that his attention was turned to it, he felt the pain in his hand he'd been oblivious to until then.

L forced himself to let go and draw in a shaky breath. He opened his mouth to tell her and the rest of the team that everything was under control…

My fault.

L flinched at the thought.

I let this happen. I could have prevented it if I'd spent less time looking at Light like he was the only criminal in Japan.

L forced the thought down through sheer force of will, but bile was rising in his throat and it stung. If Light could handle the person who'd attacked him, he would've come back before they'd even realized he was missing. This was something serious.

L needed to get Light back so he could arrest him properly.

He *needed* to get Light back before something worse happened to him.

The thought that Light might get really hurt made L–it was fine. This was fine. L had dealt with many hostage situations in the past. He'd done it once already in this case. This would be simple to solve. A day, maybe two, and they'd have Light back and things would be normal.

His heart beating erratically and his shallow breathing were shock. It was shock. And Misora's concerned gaze was irritating him. He didn't know what she was *imagining* but L was the cold and calculated detective who had never lost a case. Whatever she *thought* she saw while she was looking at him right now, this was nothing more than an annoying pause on his case. He really didn't need her looking at him like that right now. He didn't care for any of the strange looks the other investigators were giving him. He had more intellect in his pinky than they had in their entire bodies. He didn't need pity.

He'd find Light. This whole thing would be a cliffnote in the case.

He tried to forcefully slow his heart rate but one thought kept repeating in his mind over and *over* again, like a record he desperately wished would stop playing.

The last thing they did together was fight.

~ ❶ ~

Light rubbed his arm as he made his way to the end of the realm, where the Shinigami King resided, Ryuk at his back. Being yanked by his arm with that much force really hurt, but he considered it a win that his arm hadn't been dislocated. Although that definitely would have looked good when he was rescued, if he had a serious injury like that…

Anyways, they'd needed to get as far away from heavily populated areas as possible while still staying in the area where Ryuk had destroyed cameras. He unfortunately hadn't quite figured out how to get to the Shinigami Realm on his own in this form, so he needed Ryuk to fly him there. For obvious reasons, cameras seeing Light floating or people on the ground seeing a flying person was a no-go. So he'd had to be careful about when and where they did it. And Light knew that if they gained altitude quickly, anyone who saw him would just see a spot in the sky that could easily be a bird.

Thankfully, he didn't need to breathe, apparently. Light ascertained that first when Ryuk flew off with him and the air got thinner and then later when they arrived at the Shinigami Realm. Fittingly for the land of the death gods, the Shinigami Realm didn't have oxygen in the air so if he'd fully been biologically human, he would've started suffocating long before they touched down in the realm. He hadn't been sure that he'd be able to survive without air since it hadn't come up yet, so he was happy to get the confirmation.

Light suspected that would be the case, though, considering the Shinigami King said he could come visit. No matter what low opinion the other Shinigami have of their king, Light knew the older being would've taken that into consideration. It did make Light curious where his humanity began and ended these days, however. Was he a Shinigami limited by a human body or was he a human with godlike abilities? Or…was it neither of those. Light felt more like a Shinigami whose true nature was continually trying to escape the human shell he'd been shoved in.

Light shook the thoughts from his head as he proceeded past Justin with a quick bow without slowing down, finding himself almost instantly in the Shinigami King's presence. The hulking monarch looked like more of a monster than any of the other Shinigami, with his skeletal features and all of his faces, but Light felt at ease in his presence.

Light didn't say anything to draw attention to himself. He knew that the king noticed him.

"So," The Shinigami King rumbled, at last breaking the silence. It carried across the landscape even though he didn't raise his voice. "I see you've finally come…to ask me about that little project of mine that seems to be causing you trouble."

"I am. You said you'd speak to me?" Light inquired.

"Hm. I will. But Ryuk has to leave." The King responded.

Ryuk's wings ruffled behind him in agitation, but he lifted off with only mutters of complaint. They both talked about how he'd likely be kicked out when they got here, considering the King didn't want to let him in on the secret earlier. No worries, Light had assured his friend in private. He'd tell him all about it later, regardless of what the

Shinigami King wanted.

Once Ryuk had flown off - probably to bother Justin - Light prompted the king. “Okay, he’s gone. Can you please tell me what’s going on with Beyond?”

“Ah, yes, Beyond Birthday was his name.” The king said, contemplatively. “Ryuk tells me he has been causing you grief.”

“A massive thorn in my side.” Light agreed. “You called him a project?” Light prompted. He *really* needed to know what that meant. It had already been clear that the king had known something, but that comment seemed to imply he’d caused it…

“Yes, my little project. A failure, unfortunately.” The king said without any particular emotion. “Tell me, Chronos. How long do you think I’ve been in this spot, overseeing a dead realm?”

Light felt briefly knocked off-center. Both by the reference to him by his Shinigami name and the unexpected question. In truth, none of the Shinigami even knew how old their king was. He was the only king they’d ever known. “I…” Light’s mouth felt dry, his mind whirling. “I couldn’t even fathom.”

That seemed to be the right response, if the king’s chuckle was anything to go by. “I inherited this kingdom eons ago, time yet beyond your comprehension. So you could perhaps understand why I wish to have a successor. I have long grown tired of my position here and would like to pass on to Mu.”

“You just need someone to take your place.” Light finished for him.

“Correct.” The king acknowledged.

“Was Beyond meant to be a successor for you?” Light asked, thinking it over.

“He was. The most recent - besides yourself - in a long list of attempts.” The king said, calmly. Light tried not to react to the knowledge that there had been many more like B. Why hadn’t he heard of them if there were that many people like him? Were they all born with the eyes?

“They all didn’t work out, huh?” Light tried to sound casual. “Is there some kind of criteria that a successor for you needs to have?” You know, Light was getting real sick of this talk of successors lately.

“Indeed, there is. They need to have possessed traits of a Shinigami in life. Not every human who possessed a Death Note or the eyes will become a Shinigami. The only beings who become Shinigami are those who have my approval. However, there is a certain something that transfers over to their afterlives when humans had traits of a Shinigami before they died. I don’t fully understand it myself, but that strength allows them to hold up better in the afterlife without losing their drive and that is most befitting of a ruler. Perhaps it’s that it allows them to acclimate to the Shinigami Realm slowly.”

“The other Shinigami seem to hold on just fine.” Light offered.

“They hold onto their sense of selves just fine.” The king waved off. “But they lose their drive and sense of purpose over time. They wither away, bored with their very existence. It is very much outside their nature to be able to push forward and create their own purpose. Their minds are limited in a way that yours never was. In that way, although I’m loath to admit it, my subjects could have stood to hold onto a little more of their human nature after they died.”

“I suppose that makes sense. Okay, so you could only choose from those who owned a Death Note before they died.” Light concluded, feeling curiosity welling up inside him. “Is it enough if they used it or did they need to make the eye deal, too? Is using the Note on its own enough to have “traits” of a Shinigami?” Then suddenly, a new thought occurred to him. “Wait, did Beyond get a Death Note in a past life and he was sent back, too?” Light startled violently at the thought.

"No, that's not the case." The king corrected him. "But your thinking is correct in one regard. A being needs to be dead in order for me to have sway over their destiny. Or as another way of putting it, as the King of Death, I cannot directly interfere with things that are not dead. Life and death are two sides of the same coin. As the ruler of the gods of death, I can create, but I have limitations. I do create my subjects, but I cannot create them from nothing. Each Shinigami carries some traits that transfer over from their human lives.

I don’t take an active interest in most of them, but I converted you to a Shinigami upon your death because I was impressed. You were always going to be different. In a strong departure from normal, I gave you your Shinigami name. Most are not created with names. They come to be named by others or create their own over time. Whatever strikes their fancy. None of the Shinigami have memories of their human lives, just as you didn’t. Regaining those was a surprising result of having your timeline reset. Regardless, I only truly have dominion over my Shinigami and to create one, I have to use a human soul that has died and passed into the realm of death.”

The king paused, the sound of groaning chains ominously filling the space as Light hung on the king’s every word. “Once someone dies, they are no longer human. Call them a soul or something else if it pleases you, but they are no longer human. Of course, if they get brought back to the realm of the living, they can return to being human unless they’ve been changed so fundamentally that such a thing is no longer possible. That is part of the reason as to why you weren’t sent back to your human life as fully human. I wouldn’t have

felt inclined to do so even if it were within my capabilities, but I cannot undo what I've already done. The parts of you that are a death god remain even while you appear human and when you die, you will revert back to a full Shinigami."

"Of course, the whole rewinding of time situation would not have needed to occur in the first place if you hadn't put your life in peril so readily for some human child." The king leveled a scolding look at Light, to which Light didn't even bother to pretend to be ashamed.

"Is not being able to undo the changes you've made unique only to you?" Light pressed. "When Misa gave up the Death Note in my previous life, she lost the Shinigami Eyes and had to make the deal twice. Doesn't that mean that normal Shinigami can undo what they've done?"

"That is a completely different situation." The king informed him. "My subjects do not have the full range of capabilities that I have, they can only permit humans to have the eyes. But the crux of the issue there was that the eyes were offered through ownership of the Death Note - and *only* owners of a Note - therefore making continued ownership of the Death Note a requirement for the eyes. With my projects, ownership of a Death Note was never a requirement to keep their abilities. As for ownership of the Death Note and its relevance, you're asking the wrong question. It isn't a question of whether owning a Death Note is enough to qualify as having the traits of a Shinigami but rather, whether or not ownership of the Death Note is necessary, at all."

This statement brought Light up short, his brain screeching to a halt. "Excuse me?" He questioned, breathlessly.

"Just so." The Shinigami King continued. "The Death Note is not strictly necessary in order to have traits of a god of death."

"But how else would they get the eyes?" Light wondered. "They need to trade half their life for the Shinigami Eyes, don't they? Or…don't they?" His eyes sharpened as he peered up at the titanic form of his king.

The king chuckled again. "You may know much about how this realm and its denizens work, but you don't know everything. A deal for half their life isn't required to gain the eyes of a Shinigami, it is merely a law I passed requiring my subjects to adhere to so that they don't run amok. As entertaining as it might be to see the human realm delve into chaos because hundreds or thousands of children were born with the eyes, there are more drawbacks to that course than there are advantages."

This was all news to Light. Making a deal for half your life wasn't a requirement to get the Shinigami Eyes, it was a not-quite-arbitrary rule the king had set forth for the lesser Shinigami to follow. Then he had a thought. "But if a person doesn't own a Death Note, how can they agree to get the Shinigami Eyes? It's only touching a Death Note that allows them to perceive a Shinigami, at all?" It didn't make any sense. Unless…

"Consent is also not strictly necessary." The king answered promptly.

This was almost too much to process! A Shinigami could, technically, give their eyes to any human they wanted, without taking half their life and without the human even knowing about it. That… "What happened with Beyond?" Light asked quietly.

The king hummed, the sound reverberating through the land. "All humans were the same to me. I didn't particularly care about who the human was that succeeded me. All that truly mattered was that they'd had the traits of a Shinigami at some point during their mortal life, so that the power gained from it transferred over to their afterlife. However, it had been a long time since a Death Note had fallen into a human's hands. Rather than dropping a notebook down to the human

realm, I instead decided to bestow the eyes on a human child. A newborn baby. That child would be my successor."

"But why a child?" Light asked, loathing the idea of anyone messing with a child's life like that, even if he understood why the king had done it. "Wouldn't an adult be better?" It was starting to make sense, though. Beyond had been telling the truth about having the eyes his whole life.

"In what way?" The king asked rhetorically. "A human who has grown up having the eyes won't question it as much as an adult who suddenly gains them. An adult who suddenly gains the ability to predict people's lifespans would panic and act erratically. The Shinigami Realm doesn't need an unstable ruler. No, a child would be more appropriate. The only problem was how to give it to them and if they would live."

Wait, what? "What do you mean 'if they would live'?" Light parroted, his brow furrowing in confusion. Suddenly, something clicked and he felt his heart nearly stop beating. "Wait, earlier you said you could only interact with a human if they were already dead."

"That is correct, I did." The Shinigami King said, sounding proud. "I couldn't simply choose from any child on Earth. They had to have passed on at some point or I could not touch them. I could not give them the eyes."

But if the King can't manipulate a being until they've passed into the realm of death, Light contemplated. *And he gave the eyes to B as a baby…B did say he's probably had the ability ever since he was born--oh. Oh.*

"I can see from your expression that you understand what happened." The king commented.

"Beyond was stillborn." Light answered, tonelessly. He felt numb with shock. "And then you brought him back to life?"

"I didn't." He corrected. "Your human doctors did. They resuscitated him. I had to be quick, of course. I passed on the eyes while his soul was in the afterlife before it was pulled back to the human realm."

This was too much to take in all at once. He could feel a headache forming. Once again, a thought popped up in his head and his headache worsened as his head shot up. "Wait, you said he was one of many attempts, didn't you?"

The king didn't make him wait for an answer. "I gave the eyes to several children who were - as you call it - stillborn. That child was the only one I'd chosen who was brought back to the living by their doctors. That is why they were failed attempts. They were never revived."

Light felt sick at discussing the subject - thinking of stillborn babies was right up there with thinking about dead puppies - but it *did* make sense. If his successor possessing traits of a Shinigami in life was truly so significant, then the child being revived after being gifted with the eyes was a key component to the plan. The whole thing would be useless otherwise, they wouldn't be any different than any other Shinigami if they never came back to life…

“So it went. After each failure, I peered down on the human realm. I had to wait for a child to be stillborn, then give it the eyes after it successfully passed through the realm of the dead, and then wait to see if it would be successfully resuscitated.” The king fell into thought for a moment. “Actually, now that I think about it, if I recall correctly, I believe that relates to why the child was bestowed his name. I was watching when his parents came up with his name after he survived the birth. I’m not familiar with human laws, but a child’s true name

will always be the name bestowed on them by their parents. His parents named him Beyond Birthday because they were grateful he would live beyond his birth day."

Light stubbornly forced down his instinctual emotional reaction upon hearing that. B was no longer that baby and he was a threat to everything that Light held dear. He couldn't afford to let his momentary humanity go too far. Even so, he felt a pang of sadness for Beyond's parents, both for how much stress they must have been under at nearly losing their child and at the suspicion of what might've happened to them too soon afterwards for B to have grown up in an orphanage.

The king continued. "I have no way of knowing which children would survive or not, so it was very much a 'luck of the draw' situation. Beyond Birthday was the first success. I didn't interfere with his life, believing that he would only be of consequence to me when he died. Perhaps that was my mistake."

Light blinked in surprise. That might've been the first time he'd heard the king admit fault in something. He couldn't recall another time, anyway.

"Beyond's sanity began to bend and warp and he became completely unstable. Perhaps if I had interceded, my efforts would not have gone to waste with him. Unfortunately, as he is now, he is completely unsuitable to take my place." The king concluded.

"...what makes us so different?" Light breathed out, practically a whisper. His eyes, once again, were gazing somewhere else. "I was dangerously unstable by the time I died, too. What makes me more suitable than him?" Because he *had* been unstable. Thinking about what he'd become by the end of his first life gave Light chills. His memories of himself from that time almost felt like they were the memories of a completely different person, his thoughts and feelings so polar opposite to how he felt now. He *hated* thinking about how

low he'd sunk in that life.

The king huffed. "You, at least, had a vision. I'll admit that your sanity deteriorated somewhat in your past life, but I won't pretend to obey the silly morality of humans. The way it appears to me, you built something impressive with the very short time you had to live and with others actively hindering you. Compared to you, Beyond had much smaller, more petty aspirations that he still found himself unable to achieve in the end. No, your showing was excellent for a potential successor. It was not difficult to watch how you practically ruled over your realm for a short time, starting from very little, and imagine your potential if you were to replace me as King of the Shinigami. You two are very different, whatever you might be thinking now."

Light didn't know what to say to that. He felt no small amount of pride at the king pointing out his skills, but at the same time, he still felt so much shame about his past and how he achieved all that he did. He wasn't sure he wanted to be praised for it, even if none of the other Shinigami would ever understand why he would feel anything other than pride at it. Morality was…complicated for him, he supposed. For Shinigami, morality was non-existent. A complete nothing.

It was mostly so for Light, as well. If human life was fleeting, what did it matter if he killed people? If human society changed every so often, what purpose was there in trying to create *lasting* change? Light never cared about the first and no longer cared about the second. What he *did* care about - and what the others would never get - was that what Light truly felt guilt and remorse for was how he'd treated the people in his life that had deeply cared for him…and who he should have cared for more.

There's a difference between not being overly concerned with being a "good" person and being deliberately cruel. What made him a monster in his mind back then was how he'd treated those he should have loved. How he'd repaid loyalty with betrayal and love with callousness. Lying is one thing - a thing Light didn't care at all about -

but planning to kill even those closest to you at the slightest inconvenience was another. He didn't regret being Kira. He regretted being abusive. There was a reason he'd initially disdained criminals so much. It was simply hard to think about his achievements in his past life without mixing in all of the things he regretted doing to achieve them.

Light sucked in a breath. He couldn't get lost in the past right now. For both himself and B, these were things that had already happened. He had a reason for seeking out this information and for going to see the king. He wanted to know if he could kill B and how to do it. All this made it seem like B wasn't a Shinigami, so he shouldn't be immune to the Death Note. Owners of a Death Note - eyes or no - could be killed just as easily as any other human.

However, he couldn't afford to assume anything. He needed to be sure. "Can I kill Beyond with the Death Note?"

The king chuckled, lowly. "Straight to the point. He must be causing you much trouble, indeed. You can if you would like, but be warned, my child, there is much you still don't know. He holds the answers to many questions, both about the past and the case at present. If he dies, you are in store for many surprises in the future. Of course, if he lives, you risk harm to the lives of your loved ones. Quite a predicament. You, of course, are invited to stay in the realm for a while and think it over."

Light and the Shinigami King stared at each other silently for a few moments. Then Light put on his political smile. "I think I'll take you up on this offer. It'd be nice to catch up with everyone and catch my breath before going back. Life in the Human Realm happens so fast."

I was always going to stay for a little while, anyway. Light thought, morosely. *With what I've pulled to get here, I can't just go back.*

~ ❹ ~

He just needed to kill him.

That had been the initial plan when it came to Light Yagami. Of course, his death couldn't be *simple* if he wanted to leave a message, but it had been fairly straightforward in the beginning.

B had been nothing but amused when criminals had started dropping like flies in a manner that was *clearly* done with intention, despite what the public and the police had insisted in the early days. He'd watched with no less amusement as L challenged the shadow killer known as "Kira" on live television and *lost.* For the first time *ever* , L initiated a battle and *lost* .

He wasn't exactly given a lot of time to spend online, but the prison he was in gave him an hour a day on the computers in their library. Unfortunately, he hadn't been able to watch the broadcast live like a few lucky people, since he hadn't been in Japan at the time, but some lovely internet-dwellers uploaded recordings of it and now the whole world knew exactly what happened.

They all knew that L *could* be beaten by someone; that he wasn't infallible.

Words could not describe how momentous this occasion was for B and he spent hours alone, cackling in his cell over it. Possibly terrifying the staff there in the process, but they already thought he was crazy, anyway. And their avoidance of him only helped when he finally staged his escape.

That was how Beyond stumbled upon the delicious information of L's relationship with a *guy* . It was staggering! In all of his time studying L, never before had he come across anything like the detective having a friend, much less a *lover.* Someone he could *kill* .

This could've been the thing he'd always needed. L could be distant and composed because he didn't personally know any of the people he had killed and Beyond knew from personal experience how much seeing someone you care about die can fuck you in the head. It would give him the utmost joy to do that for L~

And when he found out that Light was the number one Kira suspect and always had been…it felt like it just kept getting better. It proved just how compromised L was by this guy. Now, he could prevent L from ever solving the Kira Case, ruin his reputation, and kill the person he loved. *At the same time!!* It really *couldn't* get any better. With Light being Kira, L would lose the game if his little boyfriend died before L could prove it. Even if L proved it posthumously, the man would still be dead. And then…and then Beyond could die happy and go see A.

That was all Beyond thought about as he sat across from Light at that restaurant. How *much* he wanted to kill him. But it had to be perfect. It had to be a work of art, done for maximum impact.

And to even figure out how to kill Light, he had to know how the other man's killing ability worked. After all, his target was someone who could kill people without even being in the area when the death occurs. Much like planning to kill an assassin, one does not proceed without doing proper research first. Despite the case going for months now, L and his cronies knew practically nothing about Kira or how he kills, so it was time for B to do his own reconnaissance. Except…he had to admit, Light was actually a rather interesting guy.

It started as it so often did, by following Light at a distance, always in a different disguise so he wasn't noticed. That, and he "borrowed" a different person's car each time he tailed the guy. It had been ages since Light had gone anywhere besides his college and whatever hotel their little team was staying at. B didn't expect anything interesting, though, when he was hanging around outside Light's home, especially because the cop parked directly outside meant he had to keep even further back than normal.

And then Matt and Mello, two kids currently at Wammy's House, tore out of the front door like the hounds of Hell were after them, not that

the cop in the car even noticed. And while said cop's observational skills had Beyond questioning why he was bothering to stay back so far, this new development was interesting. He didn't move a muscle when the cop went into the house, getting no closer despite his intrigue. To this day, Beyond still didn't know what happened in the house after that, but when Light went back out to the car with the cop following later, Beyond saw something that made him switch his stalking target. When the cop came back out, he went from looking normal to being pale and shaky. And when the guy looked at Light…

Something had happened in there and it had shaken the cop. That was why, after following at a distance back to their hotel and seeing only Light get out, he kept following the car, tracing it all the way back to the police station. The plot thickens. The cop stumbled out of the car with what looked like a piece of paper in his hand and beelined for the doors to the station.

Whenever he followed people to L's base, he had to stay basically at the far end of the street to keep L or "Watari" from detecting his presence. Here, he could afford to get a little closer since they were unlikely to check these cameras very often. A newspaper in front of his face and a position by the glass doors let him see the weird thing that happened inside.

The cop looked around, went to a spot behind the desk, bent down, got back up, and hurried towards the door. Beyond hastened to pull back into a corner so as to not draw too much attention. Good thing for him the cop seemed to largely exist in his own head. The guy passed by him, got into his car, and then he was gone.

But Beyond remained.

He waited several long, agonizing minutes and then, when he was sure the coast was clear, he pushed open the door and ventured into the lobby. It was unfortunate that he hadn't worn one of his disguises that day because he was definitely going to get caught on the cameras doing this, but investigating whatever just happened was too tempting to pass up and he didn't know if he'd lose evidence if he ran back to the building he was squatting in to put on different makeup.

Well, if he was going to be unsubtle about it anyway…

Beyond went straight for the area behind the desk that the cop had gone to. He didn't see anything interesting and he had to be quick before the desk officer came and shooed him away. Then B's eyes settled on a small paper shredder situated under the desk.

Huh.

Now that he thought about it, whatever made the cop so jumpy might have had something to do with that paper he was clenching in his hand when he got out of the car. Beyond didn't recall seeing it when the guy left. Beyond couldn't discount that he'd hidden it in the desk or a potted plant, but he didn't have time to turn the place upside down looking for something he wasn't even sure what it was. Beyond took the bag out of the shredder, tying it up so he wouldn't lose any pieces. He did a brief check of the desk, as well, but he didn't find anything noteworthy and he split when he heard someone coming down the hallway.

He spent the rest of his night going through the laborious task of going through each shred of paper in the bag, comparing them to each other, and meticulously taping them back together until they were all back to their original forms, albeit a little worse for wear. That was how Beyond found himself in the early morning with a bunch of reconstructed useless documents and one *very* important one. It had several names written on ordinary college-ruled notebook paper. At first, it appeared perfectly boring even if the list of names was kind of weird, except for the fact that Beyond happened to recognize several of them.

They were known victims. Members of what Beyond affectionately called Kira's Hit List. One name in particular stood out, just as innocuous as the others except for its fame. Lind L. Tailor was inarguably Kira's most famous kill, thanks to L. And there it was, written on the paper alongside the others in…someone's handwriting. On its own, it wasn't suspicious. Someone could have just been keeping track of Kira's kills to catch them, but the circumstances and the fact that the cop went out of his way to shred it was evidence in and of itself.

The very next thing Beyond did was get a few samples of Light's handwriting to compare. He'd check the cop's if he had to, but considering how shaky the guy was when he left the house, he didn't seem the Kira type, which left the only other person present who just so happened to be the prime suspect in the case.

It was easy enough to get the sample he wanted. Light went to college which required a lot of handwritten work and their computer systems were easy to hack. With Wammy's special training, it was easy to match the handwriting samples to the notebook paper's.

All said and done, Beyond felt thoroughly prepared to confront Light for the first time after all the stalking he'd been doing, but no amount of prep would've gotten him ready for this guy. The guy who could tell in an instant that he wasn't L. The guy who wouldn't give an inch in conversations. The guy who spoke by sandwiching lies between truths. He would've believed it if someone told him the guy also came from Wammy's.

He was intriguing.

Beyond wanted desperately to kill him.

It would be beautiful.

Light had enough backbone to stand tall even after Beyond showed him the evidence he'd rescued from the shredder, but he probably should've guessed that, since this person was good enough to get L's attention.

At any rate, he'd come away from that little meeting satisfied with

how things had gone. The biggest goal had been to just make first contact with Kira, but he also came away with some good information. Kira had the same ability to see people's names and death dates above their heads as he did. Beyond had suspected that to be the case when needing a name and a face to kill was tied to the guy. Plus…Beyond had never seen someone be able to change someone's death date before Kira. Beyond himself had *tried* to change someone's fate and it failed, but *Light* could.

It was a hunch, but he'd been trained to rely on those and he'd been right.

But Beyond needed to see Kira kill in a more controlled setup if he was going to learn more about his abilities and how to counteract them. After all, he had no assurance that Light wouldn't kill him, as he'd killed so many other criminals. He figured he could protect himself at first by giving Light just enough titillating information he couldn't get anywhere else to intrigue him. Light was very smart, he would know the worth of exclusive information so at least in the short term, he'd be too interested in what else Beyond could tell him to kill him, but that kind of selfish truce wouldn't last long.

As soon as Light felt he knew everything he needed to know or at least found answers to his most pressing questions, he'd take Beyond out of play rather than wait for Beyond to turn on him. He knew that because he would do the exact same in his position.

So he made a tantalizing game out of it. Giving enough useful information that Light needs, withholding some information he likely needed to prolong his own usefulness to Light's plans, all while expediting his own plans so he got to the fun conclusion before Light had enough time to consider ending him.

He now knew that – no matter what he might pretend – Light could see people's names and death dates just like he could. Beyond idly wondered what his death date was, but quickly moved on to more

important things. He'd known the second he saw Light without a death date that his suppositions were correct.

He had to give L credit for the plan he'd ultimately come up with to put Light in the hot seat. One of the first things he'd escaped prison was to hack into L's system. He'd made a nice little nest in there and it was where he'd picked up the best info that L had to offer, like that little tidbit about Light's fondness for children. He'd suspected when he found the little plan L had set up for forcing Light to kill that L knew he was in the system and was feeding him the info to trap him.

L was always too arrogant, too quick to look down on others. He didn't consider that Beyond would cotton onto what he was doing. He had to admit, though, that it was a good plan. But why on Earth would he try to sneak into their HQ, where he could easily be apprehended, when there were two boys that he was also aware were in Japan thanks to L's records that would make much easier targets? He'd be perfectly happy to use L's blueprint, like he so clearly wanted, but he would have to insist on taking some creative liberties.

For his plan, he decided that he needed to rope someone else into this. He could engineer a situation on his own that would force Light to kill while under his microscope, but he needed someone else to actually go through with the plan…for more reasons than one. He was pretty sure that whoever he got to actually do the thing would end up as a statistic and he wasn't ready to go just yet. Just as importantly, though, if he was going to reap the benefits of his little experiment, he needed to sit back at a good vantage point and be able to watch. He couldn't be an active participant for that.

He was quite happy with what he saw. It's true, Light disappeared from the screen pretty quickly and Beyond lost sight of him, but the guy's strange behavior already let him know what he needed to know. Light was not the kind of person who would go and hide when times got tough. He reeked of a man of iron will. The fact that he ran off and Beyond's puppet died immediately after was enough to tell Beyond that Light had been attempting to hide himself while he killed. Which, in turn, meant that he had some kind of physical tell

when he was killing. A physical tell that would be some kind of dead giveaway, so it couldn't be something simple like his eyes glowing or mouthing the person's name.

He could've just covered his eyes or mouth if that was the case.

Soooooo… *theoretically,* if he was tied to a chair, that might get in the way of him killing. If that was so, he wasn't as unstoppable as all that. It was food for thought, anyway. Beyond still had some stuff to test, but soon he and Light would be in for another date.

Chapter End Notes

> So this is my idea of what might have resulted in Beyond having and growing up with the Shinigami Eyes. It was really enjoyable to read everyone's ideas about why Beyond might have the eyes and what his deal is (and really hard to not rack up too many new fanfic ideas while reading them).

United Once More & Tough Decisions

Chapter Summary

Light thinks things over and L gets dragged out of his hidey hole.

Chapter Notes

Who has two thumbs and just recovered from a nasty virus after getting back from a three week business trip? Ahaha….I'm completely wrecked. I'm pretty sure this chapter is a week late and it's shorter than normal (not short, just shorter) so I'll try to update a little early next time to make up for it. I gotta tell you though, I puked so much three days ago when it was at its worst, I was worried I was going to face serious dehydration. Did not have a fun time.

Naomi had never been more upset about anything in her entire life, maybe with the exception of her fiancé's kidnapping, but back then, Light had been there to soothe her nerves. He was a shoulder to cry on that told her everything was going to be okay.

But now he wasn't here.

It seemed so strange, given how much younger than her he was, but Light was so easy to rely on. The boy was so mature, coming off as decades older than he was. As Naomi got home for the first time in two days, she was exhausted, both physically and emotionally. It had been a long time since she'd worked on a case as close to her heart as this one.

Happily, her fiance was there to greet her when she got to their rented apartment. His soft smile warmed her heart and soothed her frayed nerves.

"Welcome home, Dear." Raye came straight up to her with his arms wide open and she practically lurched into the hug.

Raye had been making a steady recovery ever since his kidnapping, but it had seemed to her for a little while now that he'd fully recovered. Actually, he'd been looking better than he'd looked ever since she'd met him. His smiles weren't tired anymore, his body language not exhausted. For the first time, it occurred to her that while her work invigorated her in most cases, his exhausted and stressed him.

Maybe that was why he'd been so convinced that she'd be happier as a housewife, Light's voice in her head suggested.

Where Naomi would usually hug him for a few seconds and then draw back, Naomi instead clung to him, grateful for the support at the moment.

"Honey?" Raye's voice questioned her, a new concern evident in it.

"We still haven't found Light." Naomi whispered, by way of answer. Her fiance started rubbing his hand on her back.

"You'll find him." Raye said, confidently.

"I wish I could believe that." Naomi said.

"You found me."

"Light did. It was his plan, not mine." She replied.

“You played a part in that plan and you’ve pulled your weight in this investigation long before now. You’re a great investigator, so don’t give up. He’s out there.” Raye spoke, his voice unwavering.

“The team is tearing itself apart. L is sequestering himself. We’re being led by an actual child.” Naomi listed off all the things that had been stressing her out while she was looking for Light.

Her fiance was quiet for a few long minutes and just as Naomi was starting to think that he had nothing to say, he spoke. “If you don’t like the way things are, then you should do what you do best.”

“Which is?” Naomi finally drew her face out of her chest and looked into his eyes.

Eyes that were shining with such love and confidence.

Raye smiled softly. “Take charge and change it. Like I said, what you do best.”

~ ❶ ~

L's finger tapped restlessly on the desk. He felt the strong urge to jump out of his chair and pace back-and-forth in the room, but he remained stubbornly seated.

He’d already tried to trace Light’s phone using the tracking device but he’d only gotten frustration in return. Something was wrong with the tracker. Light’s position seemed to be nowhere on the known map. Or rather, it was more like he was floating in the sky above known parts of the world without being anywhere in particular. Clearly there was a

device being used to scramble the signal from the tracking device. They'd had the video cameras dusted for fingerprints, alongside analyzing the damage done to them and the method used, but no fingerprints had been discovered; not Light's or anyone else's.

L's only reliable sources of new information ended up being the videos of Light's and Mello's kidnappings. He'd watched the video of Light's kidnapping exactly 236 times. He'd discovered a few more details each time, but *frustratingly* , nothing he could use to find Light. Also irritating: even with B as the absolute prime suspect, he could find nothing tying Light's kidnapping to the man.

He couldn't decide if that was strange or not.

If the LA case was anything to go off of, B should have left a calling card. And if this one was to be learned from, then B should have sent a video of Light tied up or something to that effect. He'd wasted no time in doing so when he'd kidnapped L's successors.

However, B had shown himself to be willing to kidnap people to use them as hostages. More to the point, there were no other suspects L could turn to for Light's kidnapper. From seeing what transpired on the camera footage, it was clear that Light had been kidnapped by someone else rather than running away. Someone who was at liberty to destroy troublesome cameras prior to the abduction.

Having gleaned everything he could from the security camera videos, L turned to rewatching the recording of the hostage situation with Mello. His computer was constantly recording visual and audio and saving them to a remote server. This was largely being done for a similar purpose to what it was being used as here; allowing L to look back on video calls to study what was said or seen during it. His first few weeks of meetings with the JPD were similarly recorded.

At first, the only detail of note L noticed was the back and forth between Light and B. The sniping almost made them seem *close* . It brought up a possibility that continued to occur to L; the idea that Light and B may be working together and the kidnapping was staged with B's help.

And yet…Light did show a sizeable amount of disdain towards B. while that could just be an act, L could afford to assume nothing, especially when he got to the part in the video where Light panicked over seeing Mello in mortal danger. Light appeared genuinely scared and angry at what B was doing and given that Kira killed in a hurry to save the boy, L couldn't read Light's reaction as anything other than genuine. If that was the case, L couldn't believe that Light would be willing to work with B.

The video continued while L was thinking. *"I'm just having some fun. Like I said, there's something I want to try."* That was an interesting reminder that B had somehow known - or, at least, suspected - that Light could kill without a name; something L himself hadn't even contemplated since the beginning of the case.

Even now, he didn't know if Light had always been capable of it or only suddenly gained the ability. B must have seen something in the evidence that gave him the idea to test it out or otherwise, it was something that Light had said when B had seen him. *"I needed these four for it. This man--"* Wait.

L's thoughts grinded to a halt for a split second. *What was that, again?*

His fingers flashed across the keyboard and the video rewound. The previous section of the video ran again. *"I needed these four for it."*

Four. He'd said four. Who was the fourth person?

The man - they'd identified him as Raiden Akiyama and there was nothing significant about him that L could find - was obviously one. It was clear he was referring to Mello, as well. Upon speaking with the boys after they were released, they had confirmed that Matt had been in the room at the time of the call, albeit blindfolded and gagged, so he could potentially be the third.

…who was the fourth? No one else had shown up in the video or had been mentioned during it. Mind whirling, L practically glued himself to the computer as he watched and re-watched the video continuously, but it wasn't until the 54th time that a single frame of the video caught his eye. Or rather, the watch on Akiyama's wrist did.

Because for part of the video, a cloudy image was reflected in the shiny surface of the accessory. L zoomed in hungrily, but the pixels blurred the image too much. He'd had to have the image specially enhanced, but the result was worth it when L took another look at the image and was greeted by the reflection of a slightly hazy silhouette.

Though it was a little unclear, L could recognize the face shape and the blonde hair a mile away. This was the fourth person. The person that neither of the blindfolded boys had known was in the room with them.

Misa Amane.

~ ❻ ~

Light sat in isolation in a corner of the Shinigami Realm, perched on top of a flat rock. One of the good (or bad, depending on how one wanted to look at it) things about their realm was that solitude was easy to come by. The land was far too large for its occupants.

He thought he remembered hearing something as Chronos, about there being a fraction of the Shinigami there used to be. He really didn't know much about it, though. Ryuk hadn't known much about it, either.

Now, Light found himself grateful for the open space where he could be left alone to think. He was also glad that Ryuk, who'd been waiting for him to get out of his meeting with the king, wasn't too huffy about Light asking to be alone for a while. He did have to agree to fill Ryuk in on everything later, though. For now, he had a lot to think about. He'd had one last question for the king before leaving and now those same parting words replayed in his mind.

"I don't suppose you'd be willing to tell me what these things are that Beyond knows?" Light inquired before leaving the king's presence.

"Chronos, you may be my favorite child, but I cannot simply hand you everything. You are no stranger to risk. I won't shield you from all of the costs in the world that come from them. You must decide for yourself what you stand to gain or lose, but there is something I want you to bear in mind as you make your decision…"

Light listened intently to what he said next but it was the words he said before that he now considered.

Gain and loss.

Risk and reward.

In a way, it was funny that Light's life had become so dominated by these ideas for so long. When he thought about the majority of his

first life until he encountered the Death Note, Light thought of the words "safe" and "conventional". The concept of risk was pretty much foreign to him. Most things had been handed over to him easily enough and the things that weren't - like his grades - required no real risk in order to obtain, only effort.

Light as a child was familiar with effort, rather than risk. His life had centered around school, then around studying for a future career, and then once he'd taken over for L, by his career.

Light huffed out a laugh as something occurred to him. He was probably more like his dad back then than he'd originally thought. After all, the way his whole life before the Death Note had been dominated by school and work mimicked his father's obsession with his career.

The Death Note added a large element of risk to his life that would grow to consume everything. Even now, risk was woven into his relationship with L and now he had a difficult decision to make before he went back. The core question was: should he kill B before returning or not?

He wished he had any easy answer, but there was so much to think about surrounding it. Human lives were so frustratingly complex. In the Shinigami Realm, you are at a remove from everything, including the consequences of your actions.

Human lives were built like a Jenga game: They were towers, built of layer upon layer of bricks, sloppily stacked so that losing one could result in the whole structure collapsing into ruin. He tried to strategically place his bricks to create the strongest tower he could, but he was limited by what he had to work with. The unfortunately complicated nature of human society and relationships meant that no decision could be made without affecting nearly all other aspects of their life. Thankfully, that was something Light was very familiar with by now.

Faking his own kidnapping had been done for the express purpose of giving himself the leeway to visit the Shinigami King, but he hadn't been eager to create his opening this way until the thing with Mello's kidnapping happened. It hadn't just put pressure on him to act in Mello's defense; it had much more far-reaching consequences than that.

The incident had created a suspicion towards him, arguably the first for the team, and it was ironic that L's constant suspicion of him hadn't been enough to make the team really consider Light's guilt, despite his formidable reputation of closing every case.

A few members of the team had been giving him the side-eye before he'd left. People like Aizawa who had never looked at him suspiciously before. Even Naomi had been more quiet than normal, although she hadn't voiced any concerns to him yet. It wouldn't seem like much on the service, but Light knew better. Things like that, they didn't go away. They built up. He could very well pull something again that would widen this gap.

That wasn't the only threat B posed.

He'd already threatened Mello's life and said he wanted L to suffer. The bastard posed a serious threat to the people around him. What was to stop him from targeting Touta or his father next? He could finish what he started with these kids or go after Near. The thoughts went around in circles in his head and turned his stomach. He really didn't want to let a threat like B exist in that world for any longer, where he could do more harm.

His fingers itched to pull his Note out of his school bag and get rid of the threat forever. But he forced himself to not move, still seated on his rock. The King's words played on repeat in his mind. It could be something innocuous. It could be something unimportant.

But. If B held the key to more serious problems that he would face and Light killed him…

Light grit his teeth in frustration. He didn't want to risk the lives of the people around him. He also didn't like not knowing things, especially if it could help protect those very same people.

Risk and reward. Risk and reward.

Problem was: Light had a very good idea of what he stood to lose if he let B run free, but he didn't have a firm grasp on what he stood to gain. And if he killed B, he never would. It was at times like this that Light felt his most homicidal, but he similarly restrained the urge to head to the portal to the human realm and look for some criminals to kill. He wasn't so childish anymore that he would let himself kill people off just so he didn't have to deal with his own problems.

No, he needed to solve this himself.

Death was pretty final. Well…apparently to people who weren't him. If he pulled the trigger and regretted it, would he be sacrificing those he truly cared about in the attempt to save them? What was the saying…'the path to Hell is paved with good intentions'. The old him wouldn't have hesitated to kill B and would've been confident he could deal with whatever backlash happened as a result, but the old him had also died thanks to that overconfidence.

Could he use the Death Note to have B admit everything he knows before killing himself? It was a stretch, even for him. Light had no idea what the information was and having B write down "everything he knows" was incredibly vague with no promise of success. Light was so frustrated. He'd thought this time around would be easier. He

wasn’t his old self and he had his priorities straight now…

…but what did he do when he felt like the people he cared about stood to get hurt regardless of the decision he made?

~ ❶ ~

Touta was feeling really nervous.

How'd things get so out of control? Light had gone and killed in front of the whole team, he was under suspicion again, *and* he'd been kidnapped! And L…L wasn't handling it well, at all. To be fair, none of them were handling it great, but L's way of dealing with it was ruffling a lot of feathers.

Almost as soon as Light's kidnapping was uncovered, L broke away from the group and holed himself up in another room to investigate on his own. He didn't explain anything to them and rarely communicated since. Although no one had voiced it to L yet, it rubbed quite a few members of the group the wrong way. All of them were professionals, so being shut out like that insulted a lot of them, Touta could see it.

And besides that, they should be relying on each other at times like this, not splitting up. They had to get Light back! They couldn't afford to be fighting right now. When he'd said so, Near had agreed with him, taking over for L after he'd left them. He was trying his best, but their group felt hollowed out without Light and L. Touta was trying his best to keep them together, but there's been a heavy air hanging over them since the hostage situation.

Aizawa and Ide had always distrusted L, Ide didn't have any strong feelings for Light, L distrusted Light, only Touta and Misora trusted

Near to lead the team in L's absence, and everyone except he and the chief had been less comfortable in their conviction of Light's innocence since the whole thing happened.

They'd started out as a small, close-knit group that needed to trust each other to survive and now, it was getting harder and harder to find anyone who trusted each other…even Touta was lying to everyone. Touta *knew* Light was Kira and chose to hide it from everyone every day he was here. He'd been able to compartmentalize his feelings about that because Light was *Light* but it didn't change the fact that Touta was a liar now. Working against everything they stood for now. Or well, he wasn't *helping* Light, he wasn't actively working against the team, he reassured himself.

What if…what if the reason Light was kidnapped was that someone else realized Light was Kira?

That worry, on top of every other worry he had, had been nearly giving him his own heart attack since the kidnapping. Light could be hurt or *worse* , meanwhile there was no one on his side besides Touta to keep an eye on the team and make sure they didn't turn against him. There was Light's father, but he didn't know the truth like Touta did. And if the person that took Light knew who Light was and how his abilities worked and had a plan to expose him…

Touta couldn't take it. If it was the same person that had been willing to kidnap two children a little while ago, then he'd probably already done horrible things to Light and they were all just *sitting here*--

"We're not making progress!" Aizawa seethed in frustration, mimicking his thinking and jerking Touta out of his own thoughts.

"I am aware." Near calmly stated from his position crouched on the floor. Spread around him were the toys he usually played with while

he was talking.

“We’re not getting anywhere.” Aizawa reasserted, looking at the rest of the team rather than at Near. “Ryuzaki had a temper tantrum and abandoned us and now we’re letting ourselves be led by a child and what do we have to show for it? Nothing! We’re not accomplishing anything holed up in this room. We should go out there and--”

“And what, Mr. Aizawa?” Near demanded, still calm. His gaze was still on his toys as Aizawa’s was finally drawn to him. Whether or not Aizawa had been talking to him, it looked like Near wouldn’t let it pass without a response. “Wander the streets aimlessly? Without a direction to go in, there’s hardly anything we could accomplish more out there than in here.”

Aizawa was clearly frustrated by Near’s words, but he couldn’t argue with the kid’s logic. So instead, he chose the other issue to seethe about. “If we’re going to uncover anything here, I think we need another change in leadership. We’re not getting anywhere letting a little kid call the shots, no shock there, and I’m starting to agree with the rest of the world that Ryuzaki is *incompetent!* ”

A startled, uncomfortable silence settled on the room at his statement. Near was the only one who didn’t look upset, still focusing on his toys. Touta shifted in discomfort. He really didn’t like the team fighting like this, he wished everyone would just stop so they could focus on finding Light.

“Mr. Aizawa, if your issue is my age, then I suggest you leave. I feel I shouldn’t have to remind you that my age has nothing to do with my abilities. I don’t need someone so illogical on the team.” Near said solemnly, worsening the already strained silence.

By that point, Touta was looking between the two anxiously and

didn’t notice Misora moving across the room to sit next to him, until he felt the dip in the couch beside him. He flinched when he felt it before glancing at her in worry.

“They’re at it again. Worse, this time.” Naomi whispered to him while the rest of the room was distracted by the two detectives.

Touta nodded. Aizawa hadn’t been conservative with his complaints towards L and about Near leading them, didn’t like that he - an adult man- was being led around by a child, especially with the world and the rest of the force laughing at them for not catching Kira even after all these months. Except maybe he had been holding himself back, because this was the farthest Aizawa had gone with it so far. Touta just wasn’t sure what to do about anything with this situation.

"We can't let things continue like this." Naomi said to him, her eyes steely with determination.

Touta felt himself grow strong just by seeing it, nodding his head in agreement. "But," He worried. "How are we going to fix it?"

"We have to snap Ryuzaki out of it." She declared, turning on her heel and making her way to the door with long strides.

"Huh? W-wait!" Touta called after her, stumbling as he hurried to follow. "We're just going to rush in and talk to Ryuzaki without a plan? He's really stubborn, though. And last time I saw him, he didn't look like he was in the mood to talk. Are you sure it'll work?"

"It has to work." Misora said. "Ryuzaki is the only one who can help us find Light. Near's a smart kid, but he's not Ryuzaki. He's never lost a case before now and as much as I don't like to bring it up, he's been borderline obsessive towards Light since before I joined the case."

Touta cringed at the last part. It was true that L spent more time than any of them studying Light. Well, Light was Kira, so Touta supposed it was justified, but they both seemed really into each other so he didn't think it was just that. He wasn't sure L was the miracle-worker that she seemed to think he was, but it was true that they hadn't made any progress in finding Light.

In cases like this, time was of the essence. They all knew that things would only get more dangerous for Light the longer they delayed his rescue. But were they really going to go in half-cocked to confront the World's Greatest Detective? "But we don't even know what we're going to say!"

They were in the hallway now. Misora didn't answer for a few seconds. Then she started speaking quietly, without looking at him. "We'll say that Light needs him. That he can't do this alone. Light is one of the most capable people I know, but whoever did this was skilled enough to sneak up on Light and capture him. This person won't be easy to find, especially while missing the rest of the team. Light needs Ryuzaki and Ryuzaki needs us. If he can't see that, we'll have to make him see it."

Touta looked at her profile as he thought about it and found his resolve. She was right. They didn't have the time to be indecisive. Light didn't have the time for him to be indecisive. And hadn't he been thinking before that they shouldn't let their team get torn apart like this? If he wasn't a coward, then he should put his money where his mouth is and do his best to fix it, like Light would have if he was here.

The two of them continued down the hall to the room L was holed up in in a determined silence.

L was contemplating the significance of this recent realization when he suddenly heard two sets of footsteps thundering down the hall towards his door and voices bickering. By the sounds of the voices, it was Ms. Misora and Matsuda. That was all the warning he got before Ms. Misora burst into the room, the light from the hallway nearly blinding him as Matsuda followed her inside.

"I hope by you two bursting in on me like this while I'm investigating, it means you've discovered something that can help locate Light." L said with irritation.

"Um…n-no, we haven't." Matsuda stuttered in his usual mousy way. L's annoyance only increased. He didn't actively wish for the man to die, but how *convenient* it would have been if he had. Ms. Misora quickly distracted him from the stain that was Matsuda.

"You need to come out of this room and back to the main one. You shouldn't hole yourself up like this and we're done tolerating it." Misora said, staring at him directly.

Unlike with Matsuda, L's respect for Misora kept him from becoming more irritated than he already was by their interruption. "I am unaware of why I would need to come out of this room. As you can see, I'm in the middle of investigating."

"You can investigate just as well in the main room with us." Misora parried.

"I doubt that's true. Here, I am free of annoyances and distractions." *Like Aizawa.* "And I am sure there are a few members of the team that are happy to be free of my presence."

“That’s not true!” Matsuda burst out from behind her, taking a step forward.

L shot him a cutting look and the man was immediately cowed. “You’ll forgive me if I’m not confident in your words. At any rate, I have always done my best work alone.”

Misora drew in a breath and closed her eyes for a moment before opening them again. “Not this time, you don’t.” She insisted. “You’ve solved all of your other cases alone, but this one’s different.”

“I assure you,” L asserted. “I’ve already made several important discoveries on my own, thus far.”

“Good. Let us in on it.” Misora wouldn’t back down. “Listen, holing yourself up in here is only dividing yourself further from the team. Light’s not here to smooth things over for you this time, the way he’d been doing before. You *need* to keep this team together.”

“Anyone who doesn’t like it is free to leave.” L stated, turning his back to her to face the screen again. He felt more than saw her hand lash out and whip his chair back around so he was facing her again. Matsuda looked between them nervously.

“I heard that you admitted the reason you put this whole team together is because you didn’t think you could beat Kira alone. I agree.” Misora said. L’s hand tightened on his knee but he remained silent for a moment. “Even if you have some more clues now, what if it’s Kira that’s taken Light? Are you any more capable of beating them than you are now? And if it isn’t, it still doesn’t mean you’re any more capable of rescuing Light.

I *know* you see us as holding you back, but if we’re going to get Light

back to you, we need you and you need us. Afterwards, you can break apart the team or whatever it is you're trying to do, but for now? Come back and work with us. Two halves of a team working separately can't even be called effective, nevermind as effective as one team working together would be and I know you know that."

As much as L didn't like it, Misora's words were hitting their mark and for once, Matsuda chose to step forward and say something actually meaningful, as well.

"Ryuzaki…" Matsuda started, slowly. "We all care about Light. We all want him to be brought home. If you rejoin us and find that we hold you back - if *I* hold you back - then you can kick us all out, but we're here to help. Don't toss that away if Light could pay the price for it."

There was something very frustrating, L found, about someone he despised making logical sense and even more, something he didn't want to agree with sounding right.

L knew he was behaving at least partially irrationally and he was becoming ready to admit why to himself. It was about his feelings towards Light and Watari calling him out on them. L had told himself that he couldn't trust Light and even if he could, admitting that he cared would come at the cost of losing the war he'd been waging this whole time. He couldn't abide that for someone whose motives could never be trusted, even if he cared for L as he claimed to.

And then Light proved that he could kill without a name. That he could kill L at any time. The one thing that L had thought was always assuring his safety and the thought he kept in the back of his mind that if Light had his name, he may just change his mind and kill him one day, all of that was swept away by this realization.

His justification for not trusting Light's affection had always been

because he couldn't prove Light wouldn't kill him if he had all the information he needed. Sitting alone in this dark room, away from everything, he'd sat in the realization that Light could have killed L the moment he met and simply *didn't*.

He'd come to that realization…

…and been *lost*.

A Reunion of Allies

Chapter Summary

Light and L continue to parallel each other and no one has any idea what's going on anymore.

Chapter Notes

I'm early this time! HA!! I said last time I'd try to be early~

"We are not going to waste time." L said calmly. The trio had gone back to the main investigation room. L didn't receive the warmest welcome - not that he seemed to notice - but at least Near ceded control to him easily enough. When asked about it, Near only stated that the most capable person should lead.

"Light has been missing for three days now. Ordinarily in missing person's cases, the first twenty-four hours are the most important. We're already behind, so we need to put all of our effort into finding him as soon as possible. To do that, we need to define what we know and build up from that. First and foremost, who - if any such person exists - would have had the motivation to kidnap Light?"

"What do you mean 'if such a person exists'?" Touta cocked his head to the side in confusion.

"I mean that we can't take it for granted that there was another party involved, at all." L responded. "We have yet to uncover the motive behind Light's kidnapping, as well as who is behind it. As such, we need to keep all options open, including the possibility that Light may be working with them to throw suspicion off of himself at a critical time in the investigation."

"What exactly are you accusing Light of?" Aizawa demanded confrontationally. "Are you suggesting the Son of the Chief of Police is working with criminals? Or is this about him being Kira ag—"

"I am making no accusations." L calmly interrupted Aizawa's tirade. "That is exactly against the point, which is to leave all option open until the facts are all in. At this time, we don't even know why Light was kidnapped or if those behind it are an individual or a group." He reminded them.

"Light couldn't have possibly kidnapped himself!"

"And why is that?"

"W-" Aizawa looked caught off-guard. "What do you mean 'why'?"

"Yes, it's true that in this case, Light couldn't have kidnapped himself, but I have actual reasons for concluding this while you seem to have decided it apropos of nothing." L said.

Touta winced at how condescending that sounded, even though he was sure L didn't mean it to sound like that.

Without giving Aizawa a chance to respond to the slight, L pulled up the video of Light's kidnapping on his computer, already frozen on the moment that Light was pulled out into the alley.

"Tell me, if you were going to fake your own kidnapping by throwing yourself into an alley, would you have been able to do so with *this* amount of force?" L gestured to the screenshot, where Light was almost a blur as he was yanked into the alley.

Even Touta could see the force that Light had been pulled with. It

wasn't just about where the video had been stopped, it was also that Light's whole body looked like it had been *jerked* to the side, and he wasn't a small person.

"And tell me, even if you could throw yourself to the side with such force, could you have done so with the necessary force while only having been walking at a leisurely pace moments before? Do you believe you would already have the momentum for that? In addition, would you be able to make both of your feet leave the ground almost vertically as Light's does here in the fraction of a second before he disappears into the alley?" L directs their attention.

Well, no, now that Touta thought about it, he wouldn't have been able to do that, if it was him. He was pretty sure that broke some kind of natural law - or several of them - but he didn't know enough about that sort of thing to know which ones, exactly. Not for the first time, he wished Light was there. Light always took the time to explain to him when things went over his head. Light had a way of breaking things that seemed complicated down in a way that made it much easier to understand and he never made Touta feel stupid while he did it. He was one of the only members of the team that did that for him.

It looked like the rest of the team agreed with Touta for once because no one said anything, but the looks they all shared said they understood L's evidence for Light's innocence, as he did. Innocence in this, anyway. Touta would admit that he didn't completely understand why they needed to establish that Light didn't kidnap himself - why they couldn't just assume that - but he wasn't the world-famous detective, so…

But…there was one thing that Touta hadn't been able to stop thinking about during the last few days in the midst of everything. What were the chances that Light being kidnapped had nothing to do with the Kira Case? While the rest of the team might assume that it's because Light is working on the case, Touta couldn't help but wonder if it wasn't exactly like that. Maybe…there was someone - a person who looked a lot like L came to mind - who'd found out Light's secret and that's why they took him.

"Could it be…" Touta swallowed as he nervously suggested the idea. "Could it have been someone who knew something about Light?" He really wasn't sure he should be bringing this up while Light was gone, but if it helped them find Light before something really bad happened to him…

L paused and slowly turned to look at him. "Pardon?" He inquired.

Touta cleared his throat. "Just that…" Touta struggled, thinking of the best way to say it. "Maybe it was someone that knew Light or knew something about him. I-I don't know what they could know about Light that would put him in danger, but…" Touta drew off, the lies curdling on his tongue. He *did* know what they could know about that would endanger Light, but to everyone else, Light is an innocent boy in his first year of college who'd never done anything wrong. That was absolutely what Touta had thought of him.

"Someone who knows him…" L's mutter quickly pulled Touta out of his self-loathing spiral before he got too far in. Eyes darting over to the man hunched in his chair, Touta saw that he was staring off into space now.

"Ryuzaki..?" He couldn't help but feel uncomfortable about that look on the detective's face, even if he couldn't say why.

"If we're going to find Light, we need to identify the limits of where his kidnapper could've taken him. We must impose further limits on them while removing our own." L said, suddenly seeming to come back from wherever he had gone.

"What do you mean by that?" Touta asked. He was confused, but he would do whatever it took to have Light back safely.

"It means," Misora said with dawning comprehension. "That a kidnapping victim is hard to hide and even if they had a car, there's only so far they could run in Japan. They wouldn't have been able to leave the country without being caught, especially once we became aware Light was missing. If they didn't have a car, they probably couldn't have made it more than a few streets away."

"Our best evidence of their limitations are the security cameras." L said. "The security cameras were destroyed in a wide range around where the kidnapping occurred, but compared to the actual size of Japan, it was very limited. Even if they had a car that they bundled Light into in one of the blind spots they created, chances are that we would have picked Light up on a camera that wasn't destroyed once they left that bubble. What this means is they are absolutely still in Japan and likely still in the Kanto region."

Wow… Touta thought, gazing at L. it was at times like this that L was truly impressive. He did…wonder about that brief moment when L seemed to be lost in thought, though.

~ ❶ ~

Why hadn't L seen it before? Light could've been abducted by a former partner, the one he had referenced before. It seemed such an obvious possibility now, but he just hadn't *seen* it. Someone who knew Light and yet was a complete unknown to them. What felt like ages ago, Light had let slip a firsthand account of what a one-sided love life was like. A love life that - as far as L could tell - didn't exist on record and that his father knew nothing about.

That possibility would also go towards explaining how *Kira* got kidnapped. If Light was emotionally compromised by the person who kidnapped him, he wouldn't have fought back to the extent that L knew that he could. Especially if - for whatever reason - Light didn't

want them dead. However, if that was the case, then L had substantial cause for concern. Despite specifically looking for it, L had yet to find conclusive evidence that Light had *ever* dated *anyone* , which meant that the relationship would have had to have been *very* secretive.

It seems as if no one besides L knew about it. If they couldn't identify the individual that had been with Light, they couldn't use them to find Light. They would need to do the reverse if this person was indeed the one that took Light and once they found him, they would make sure that guy never saw freedom again.

But L wasn't going to say anything about that until he had enough to conclusively back it up.

"Well, I guess that's better than having no idea where to start looking…" Aizawa begrudgingly said, causing L to pull himself from his thoughts. "At least if he's still in this region, that's something."

"If they found a place - temporary or otherwise - within the area of destroyed cameras, that would be the easiest place to go with a kidnapping victim. It's a dangerous location, given the proximity to where the crime occurred, but they may have decided that it was worth it. Whether or not that's what they actually did remains to be seen."

"We've already searched the whole area."

"You mean that you searched the streets for evidence rather than the buildings. I doubt you could do so on your own without a warrant." L said, rather than asked. No one in the group responded to that with several members shifting uncomfortably. Out of consideration for them, he didn't mention that he himself could have easily gotten away with having several street's worth of buildings searched without a warrant. It was something he might need to look into if the day came

to an end and he still didn't have a good lead on Light's location.

"There is one other matter to consider." L said. "Whoever kidnapped Light likely wanted us to know that they did so, even if they kept their identity hidden."

"Why do you say that?" Chief Yagami asked, his voice hoarse.

L glanced at the man. He looked rough; he must have been struggling greatly with his son's kidnapping. He likely felt guilty and L didn't know whether the man had told his wife and daughter or if he'd chosen to keep it a secret for now. Either way, L didn't envy him his situation. The only thing L could do for him was to find his son quickly. "Tell me, why is it that nearly every camera in the area was taken down but the one in the street that allowed us to see Light being taken remained?" His question initially garnered only silence.

"Because he didn't know the camera was there?" Ide suggested.

"He knew the others were there." Naomi - rather than L - said. She had a thoughtful expression on her face.

"Exactly." L agreed. "Are we to believe he knew where all of those cameras were, but not for the one across the street that just so happened to catch Light being pulled into the alley? And are we to believe that the only camera that he supposedly didn't see didn't catch any footage of the actual kidnapper? Very lucky for him, if that is the case." No one had anything to say to that.

The room dropped into a contemplative silence, but L wasn't done. "And what of the cameras leading to Light's home? At some point on the journey, he could have destroyed *those* cameras in an attempt to obscure the path Light took and gain more maneuverability for

himself. The fact that he didn't do that implies heavily that the camera catching Light's kidnapping was an intentional move. If that is the case, then we may presume that they wanted it to be known that Light was kidnapped. In the unlikely event that the perpetrator isn't aware that Light is a member of an active investigation, he could be sure that the police would comb through the available footage once Light's family reported him missing."

"But why would they want the attention? It would make it so much harder to get away with the crime later." Matsuda questioned him.

"That is difficult to answer, although perhaps they were confident that they wouldn't get caught, regardless. At any rate, the apparent attention-seeking nature of the kidnapper does point strongly towards the criminal known as B being the culprit or otherwise somehow involved."

"So you *do* know who that person was." Aizawa openly accused.

Immediately after the phone call during the hostage situation ended and had left the room, the rest of the group had demanded to know who that person was and why he seemed to know both Light and L. L had adamantly refused to give any further details about the incident outside of what he was forced to admit about having brought Matt and Mello in, instead prioritizing retrieving the two boys from B's grasp. He refused to acknowledge their questions and concerns about B…until now.

He'd valued his secrets more than Light and now Light could be in danger. The small amount of truthful information L was giving away now was him acknowledging that Light had become more important, even if he would rather not admit that aloud.

"Yes, I know him. I apologize for not giving a proper explanation

before now. I was shocked to see him appear here and in the manner that he did. Following that, I was quite troubled by Light's disappearance." L said, the last part not being a lie. "I am unsure how much you know about the LA BB Murder Case that took place in the United States six months ago, but I met B during the course of it."

"I let the rest of the team know about my interactions with B during the LA case." Misora said, not appearing to feel guilty over that fact.

L had no particular problem with her doing so. It saved him some time with troublesome explanations and Misora didn't know the full story, so there was a limit on how much damning information she could have provided about B. It took merely a second for L to remember the information she had access to and to frame an explanation around it. "Then you should all know that B is an incredibly dangerous individual. His true name and origins are unknown. All we know is that a few years ago, he appeared in Los Angeles, California and committed a string of murders, before attempting to commit suicide. He's a dangerously unstable individual. You've seen yourselves how few moral qualms he has when he kidnapped those two boys."

It was a gamble on L's part to bring Matt and Mello up. Although he'd side-stepped many of the team's questions immediately after the event, earning more ire in the process, but the one thing he'd been forced to concede to was giving more information about Matt and Mello. It was nearly impossible to do otherwise with the stunt Beyond pulled. It was made clear during the encounter that the children were as familiar to L and Light as B was. He wasn't going to reveal the existence of Wammy's House, so he gave the two boys the same backstory he gave Near; that they were unrelated investigators he'd become acquainted with during his work.

As loathe as he was to admit to deceiving the majority of the group again, knowing how that would be taken, he told them that he had brought them on as independent investigators at the same time that he brought in Near, but that they elected to take a more remote role and asked that their involvement remain a secret. Namely, to avoid situations exactly like the one they faced. He was very sure that

Aizawa nearly leapt at him when he realized that L had brought in a total of *three* children to what was "supposed to be a serious investigation", as he put it.

L saw Aizawa's expression souring and decided to preempt him by moving on quickly. All of these arguments were exhausting. "I've saved the final lead I've discovered for last. I'm unsure if it will help us find Light, but I have revealed one culprit we know for sure was part of the previous kidnapping."

L proceeded to show the group the enhanced screenshot that revealed Misa Amane.

"The picture isn't particular clear. It could be someone else." Soichiro suggested.

"It's her." Misora replied before L could.

"Are you sure?" Aizawa asked her.

Misora gave him a bland look. "With how many times I met with her and we sat down having discussions? I *studied* her. Even if the reflection is grainy and distorted, I can tell her hair, face shape, and silhouette."

"That's the conclusion I came to, as well." L said. "She was involved in the last kidnapping, she could be involved with this one. In order to determine that, we need to speak with her. Have you contacted her since Near ordered you to cease contact?" He directed the last question to Misora.

"No." She shook her head.

"Then our first move is for you to contact her again and set up another meeting. Try to get on her good side so she'll give you the information we need."

"What if she won't give the information?" Misora asked with a pensive expression.

"Then we'll figure out a way to lure her to a hidden location and 'arrest' her. From there, we will interrogate her." L said, decisively.

The entire group outside of Near sent shocked looks at L, which he didn't really think was warranted.

"We can't just *do* that. There's proper procedure—" Aizawa started, but L cut him off, not in the mood to humor him.

"I'm well aware of the proper procedure for arrests under ordinary circumstances, but this investigation is far out of the ordinary. We've yet to catch Kira and now one of our own is missing; if there was ever a time for having delicate sensibilities, it is most certainly not now. If you're unwilling to move outside of your comfort zone, even to resolve a kidnapping, then I suggest you leave. However, I'm willing to do whatever it takes to find Light. If you're of the same sentiment, then you'll do everything you can to assist in this plan."

Aizawa shut his mouth, suitably chastised. The rest of the group was a mix of expressions, many looking very ambivalent, but no more complaints were made. Perhaps surprisingly, the only one who didn't look like they had any qualms about this was Soichiro. His tired but stony expression gave nothing away besides determination.

"I," Matsuda said, surprising them all by shooting up from his chair and clenching his hand. "I'm willing to do anything to get Light back!" He proclaimed.

A beat. "Me too." Misora said. She remained seated, but as L turned to look at her, she looked no less firm in her conviction than Matsuda. The other members of the group chimed in with their own agreement, one after another.

"Then," L said. "Let us work out the particulars."

Once they'd outlined their gameplan and Misora had contacted Misa, L - exhausted by the social interaction with these trying people - decided to retire to a corner of the room while they waited for a response from Misa. Suddenly, L's phone rang and he turned away to answer it.

"…Ryuzaki." Watari's voice came through the phone.

"What?" L asked in frustration.

"Near's toys just arrived from the store. They apologized for the delay." What was left unsaid was that Watari could have gone to the toy store at any time to pick the toys up himself instead of waiting for the store to deliver them, but neither he nor L had thought it was important enough to do at the time.

"Should I take them to Near's bedroom?" Watari asked.

"…no. Bring it up to the investigation room. I'll give them to him now." L said, quietly. The boy had waited for them long enough. Light would want him to have them now.

"…understood." If Watari was curious about L's decision, the man was too dignified to make mention of it, instead going along with L's whims the way he always did. Both of them hung up and L waited with some anxiety for the items to be delivered to the room, which were done with the expected expediency. Watari didn't linger in the room longer than it took to inquire if L needed anything more from him, to which L responded in the negative.

Once the older man was gone, L's hand tightened around the shopping bag that held the gifts Light had bought for Near. Most of the group had taken notice of Watari arriving with something in a bag, but they were satisfying themselves with watching him out of the corner of their eyes to see what it was. L ignored them and instead headed quietly over to Near, the only one in the room who wasn't obviously watching him.

He stood silently next to the boy for a few seconds until Near glanced up at him. L couldn't help but notice the moment he'd entered the room that his successor was wearing the coat Light had given him.

There was not an atom of L's being that wanted to unpack that.

He felt so awkward, it bafflingly felt like an almost physical pain. "I have something for you." L truly didn't know what to say, but his instincts were having words come out of his mouth, anyway.

"Something…for me?" L didn't blame him for sounding confused, L had never gotten him or his other successors anything. But this wasn't his gift, it was Light's.

"Light purchased this for you before he went missing." L informed him. Unsure what to do with his hands, L placed the bag next to Near who waited for a few moments before moving to look in the bag. His eyes blinked open wider as he saw what was inside. Gingerly, he reached in and shuffled the contents around. This he did for several moments until he eventually grabbed one of the toys and pulled it out, a large dinosaur toy. He held it out in front of himself, staring at it with confusion.

The next words were out of L's mouth before he was consciously aware of saying them. "Light picked each of them out himself, but he seemed particularly proud of this one. I think he hoped you would like it the best."

Near's eyes flicked to L before going back to the toy in his hands, giving L a brief glimpse of the emotion in his eyes, although L shied away from identifying it. Then, slowly, Near drew the toy closer and cradled it against his chest. He didn't say a word at first and then quietly, "Thank you."

L didn't point out that he had done nothing for Near to be thanked for. If anything, he was the reason Near hadn't gotten Light's gifts sooner… because he hadn't thought they were important. Seeing Near quietly holding the toy Light bought to his body, L found he couldn't make the kind of observation he normally would aloud. Instead, L did the thing he usually loathed doing; he retreated, except something stopped him in his tracks.

A hand caught his elbow and, resisting the urge to flip the person who'd grabbed him, L turned around to face Soichiro Yagami. The man had hardly said a word during the meeting. L wondered what he had to say suddenly.

The man's tired eyes belied a simmering determination. "You're lost

without my son, too, aren't you?"

L didn't know how to begin answering that question, so he didn't. Maybe the man saw something of his own response to Light's kidnapping in L's.

Soichiro realized quickly that he wouldn't get a response, but he didn't seem to need one. The only change in his demeanor was that his grip tightened on L's arm. "Bring my son back, L." His tone was heavy. L could read between the lines. Soichiro was telling *L* to find his son, despite making it clear that he wanted L to stay away from Light beforehand. He could see the conditional approval being offered. Instead of unpacking any of that, L gave his own response.

"I will stop at nothing."

~ ❶ ~

Eventually, Ryuk came to pull Light out of his thinking funk, insisting that he join the rest of them for a while. Listless from all his worrying, Light allowed Ryuk to drag him to an area where a large amount of Shinigami were gambling. It was a favorite pastime of Shinigami - mostly just one to chip away at the boredom - and one that Light could never really get into, even as Chronos.

"Oh, look who it is! It's Chronos." One of the Shinigami exclaimed upon looking up at the duo's arrival.

"Good to see you back. Are you staying?" Another one asked casually.

"It's good to see all of you, as well." Light responded with a tired smile.

"Sorry, but I'm not staying."

"Still in the middle of that pet project of yours? Doesn't seem to be treating you all too well." The same Shinigami said, pausing to take a good look at him.

Do I look that tired? Light sighed and plopped himself down next to one of them. The Shinigami he sat next to whooped and the rest of the group immediately started complaining.

"No fair! I want Chronos to sit next to me!" One complained. "I bet I'll win if he does!"

Light wasn't one to gamble but he'd sometimes sat with them to socialize more. As Chronos, he'd made a game out of counting cards and memorizing the mannerisms of the Shinigami playing. Annnnd he may have made a habit of telling his observations to whoever he happened to be sitting next to at the time. The others quickly learned that whoever sat next to Chronos rarely lost a game. And so ensued a mini game of tug-of-war every time Chronos showed up.

"So what's going on with that human you're infatuated with?" One asked.

Light shuffled in discomfort at L being brought up now. What *was* going on with L?

Light was upset with him, he was angry. There was some hurt, too, although he wasn't sure that reaction was fully warranted. It was just…L targeting children attacked a soft spot within Light. It was something he cared a lot about. Then when he called L out on it, all the man did was try and turn it around on him and undermine his words by accusing him of saying everything because he was Kira.

Yes , Light was Kira, but why on Earth should that mean that what he had to say didn't matter? Finding out that the person he loved had been abusing children and then having that same person try to discount his words like they didn't matter was awful. It was incendiary. And yet, he wasn't so angry that he didn't wonder how L was doing with him gone and if he cared. And if he was okay. Light didn't think B was going to do anything again so soon, but he couldn't help but worry. It didn't feel good, being both very angry and very worried about the same person at the same time.

"Ah, what? Cat got your tongue?" Another Shinigami teased him, making Light realize that he'd let the silence stretch while he was lost in his thoughts.

"More like a human got it!" Another jeered.

Light found himself huffing out a faint laugh and rolled his eyes at their joking. "I came back because I had stuff to deal with here, but I admit, it's nice to get away from everything going on back home and take a breather." If only the space had allowed him some clarity of mind. Instead, he felt as if his path forward had only become foggier.

"Did something interesting happen?" A Shinigami asked.

" *Oh* , he's probably talking about that whole kidnapping thing!" Another one answered.

"Why would he be upset about the kidnapping he staged for himself?" Yet another asked them.

"No, no, the one *before* that." The previous one sent back.

Light let their discussion roll over him as he sunk back into thought, until Ryuk decided to jump into the conversation. "Some human is threatening him."

Light sent him a glare but it lacked heat. Ryuk hadn't given away any sensitive information he wouldn't want shared, so it was no harm done.

"A human? A threat?" A Shinigami repeated, sounding incredulous at the claim. "What kind of threat could a human ever be to a Shinigami? If they ever got too big for his britches, Chronos could always just write his name down and be done with it."

"It isn't that easy." Light defended his decision-making skills, but didn't want to go into detail. Partly, that was because he didn't want to talk about it, but it was also because he didn't think giving them all the information would make them understand his position any more. None of them knew what it was like to be human with human problems like Light did and so they all had very simple ideas on how to handle things. What was it the Shinigami King said about them? They lacked creativity and imagination? He wasn't wrong.

"Well, easy or hard, I'm sure you'll show that human their place quickly enough." The same Shinigami waved off as he shuffled his playing cards, clearly having no further interest in this conversation. "After all, you're Chronos. The only Shinigami I know of that bent time to their will, I know that. You'll find a way to get through it soon enough." Several other members of the group nodded distractedly in agreement.

Maybe Light should've just rolled his eyes at how simply the other Shinigami wrote his serious problems off as easily dealt with. Perhaps he would have in a different situation, but for some reason, the ease with which they did so took root in him. Light found himself almost

touched at how simple it seemed to the other Shinigami that Light would turn the situation to his favor. As if it were a given.

Maybe that kind of faith - delivered in such a casual manner - was exactly what Light needed in the moment, because as he sat there marinating in it, he almost felt as if his mind was clearing. The funk he was in slowly lifted and although it could have been his imagination, he felt like he was thinking more clearly. He'd been stuck in a mental spiral before, he could see that now, maybe with some decision paralysis. But he was Light - he was *Chronos* . He'd been through far too much to let this shake him too badly. He'd always made his worst decisions when he allowed himself to be blinded by his emotions. He needed to calm down, not let his thoughts get cluttered, and let the ideas flow like water. He could do this. The same way he'd always done.

"You're right." Light said, standing up with a steely look in his eyes. "I'm Chronos. When there's something I want, I get it. I'll make it work the same way I always have. If B is too much of a threat to let live but there's an unknown cost to killing him, then I'll just have to defang him to the point where it doesn't matter anymore."

"Oh?" One of the Shinigami asked, craning their neck at him. "And how are you going to do that?"

"I've got some ideas." Light replied, cryptically. And it was true, his mind was already coming up with possibilities at a rapid pace. "But make no mistake, I'll break every bone in his body if I have to in order to protect those I care about." With that, Light turned on his heel to walk away.

"Where is he going?" One of them asked.

It was Ryuk who answered. "To plan." He cackled, getting up and

following Light. The two of them left, leaving behind a group of very confused Shinigami that felt as if they had just missed something.

~ ⓚ ~

Naomi forcefully settled her nerves even while she kept her body language relaxed and her expression pleasant. She never thought she'd feel so discomforted by setting up a meeting with a girl - a *model* - younger than herself and yet, right at that moment, she was thankful for her FBI training. This girl deeply unsettled her. In some ways, it was difficult to discern why, and in others, it was all too easy. Naomi had dealt with obsessive, dangerous stalker cases in her career and those individuals had an eerily similar energy to Miss Amane.

To anyone else, it might seem utterly preposterous for her to be so discomfited by it. There was no evidence that Misa had stalked or harmed anyone. If anything, she was the victim of such a crime in the past. Her having a similar feel as dangerous individuals she'd dealt with in the past was merely a gut feeling, it wasn't proof that she had or would harm anyone. Few people understood Naomi's respect for her own intuition and how much stock she placed in it, but she trusted it implicitly. Her instincts were the very thing that had allowed her to close many cases and, far too many times, her faith in it had saved her life.

And she felt that this girl was unhinged in a way that couldn't be blamed on her admiration for Kira.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet me, Misa." Naomi greeted her with familiarity after all of the meeting they'd had. Naomi pushed her discomfort down harshly to give Misa a warm smile.

Misa gave her a bright, sunny grin in return. "Of course! I'm happy to see you after so long! What kept you so busy?"

Naomi knew she would ask about how they'd ghosted her without a word after that last meeting. It was on Near's orders for her safety, but of course, she couldn't tell Misa that. Near and L had already told her what to say when it inevitably came up. "I'm afraid there was a recent development in the case and it became dangerous for us to meet. I was afraid harm would come to you if you were to be seen with me." A little truth, misrepresented, and a little flattery. It was simple but well-constructed.

"Oh, I see!" Misa crowed in that excitable way of hers, clapping her hands together. "And that's probably why you couldn't contact me to let me know what was happening, either, right, *L* ?"

"That's right…" Was Naomi imagining things or was there something strange about the way Misa called her "L"? It almost felt like there was something mocking about it that hadn't been there the first few times they'd met.

Carefully, Naomi continued. "I'm glad you understand. I can only contact you now because the situation has been safe enough to make contact again."

"Does that mean you've dealt with whoever has been causing you trouble?" Misa asked, tilting her head to the side and blinking in innocent question.

Naomi continued to feel disconcerted. "For the most part, yes, but actually, I could use your help to deal with them permanently."

Based on her previous experience with Misa, the girl should've jumped at the opportunity to be of service. She'd spent all of their previous meetings begging to be able to do *something* for L/Kira. Instead, Misa's

response was comparatively restrained.

"Oh, is that so?" She asked in a bright tone.

She had a really bad feeling about this. Deeply unsettled, Naomi pushed forward, but she already suspected the response she would get wouldn't be in their favor. "You see, there's a person who's been causing trouble for me. He calls himself B. Recently, he's the prime suspect in three kidnappings, two of them children and one of them a member of my investigation team. Despite his crimes, he's still free, and I would like to bring him to justice as soon as possible."

"But what could I do to help with that?" Misa asked, still not sounding very excited.

"We have found evidence that you might've met this person."

Misa's smile stiffened. "Oh?"

"Do you know someone that meets this description?" Naomi handed Misa a paper they'd prepared ahead of time with B's specs, provided by L. They were almost identical to L's own, but there were *some* differences.

Misa took the piece of paper gingerly and glanced over it, but Naomi could tell she didn't actually read the whole thing. "I've never met anyone who looks like this."

At least try to lie better , Naomi thought. "Are you sure? You can take more time to think about it."

"I *haven't* ." Misa said immediately, sounding more irritated at her insistence.

"He might've been in disguise. Do you recall coming across anyone who seemed strange? He could've shared some of the traits on the list and hidden others, as well."

"Look, I meet dozens of new people every day in my line of work! Even if I met them, I wouldn't *remember* ."

She keeps adamantly denying having anything to do with him, Naomi thought with irritation. She couldn't get information this way. She really didn't want to, but she may need to tell L that they'll have to go ahead with his interrogation plan.

Something about it got on Naomi's nerves. "Misa, if you know something about it, you need to come forward. It could really help me out a lot." She paused. "Didn't you want to help L?" She tried.

Apparently, she'd stepped on a landmine with Misa. "Stop pretending that you're L! You're not!" She shouted, jumping up. The explosion was so sudden that Naomi nearly jerked back, but her training kicked in and stopped her. She didn't want to know what her face was doing, though.

"What are you talking about? I—"

Misa interrupted her. "You're *not* ! I know the truth. I'm not *stupid* , you know. I know you've been lying to me this whole time. B told me the truth, that you've been using me!"

Well, Naomi thought, nonplussed. *At least she's admitting to knowing B.*

"Misora." A voice in her ear immediately captured her attention. The voice coming through her comm device didn't wait for her to respond, he knew she wasn't at liberty to do so. "Since it's come to this and she knows you aren't me, the best option we have for getting the information we need out of her without interrogating her may be to meet her myself."

Naomi heard the faint sound of one of the other team members protesting over the line.

"We have little choice to do otherwise." L said. "Torturing someone for information takes time. Time which we don't have. If she were loyal to B, then we'd have no choice, but if her issue is that she realizes you aren't L, then we may yet have a more expedient option available to us."

Naomi chose that moment to tune out the argument still going on over the comms. Unlike the others, she wasn't going to question L right now. The man was clever and Naomi believed that no one wanted Light back more than him right now. She trusted that he wasn't coming up with this without thinking it through first. So she'd trust him the way she'd always done.

"You're right." She said, steadily. Simultaneously, Misa fell silent in front of her the same way the conversation on the comms dropped off. "I'm not L. I'm sorry for deceiving you, but I needed to know what kind of person you were before really letting you in." She hoped this would work.

"You're…admitting you're not L?" Misa asked, obviously confused.

"I am. Actually, I work for him. I hope you understand that he can't simply meet with anyone who wants to meet him, so I act as a filter for people who would do him harm or aren't worth his time." Naomi hoped she could endear herself to Misa again by deliberately misrepresenting her relationship to L. If Misa still worshipped L because she believed he was Kira, then making herself seem like more of a fixture in L's life would make Misa feel better about her. In the same way, framing Naomi's relationship with L as her working *for* him rather than *with* him might form a stronger connection between her and Misa, since Misa saw herself as more of a follower or a worshiper of Kira.

"It was a test." Misa's eyes lit up.

That was a quick turnaround , Naomi noted. It wasn't completely unexpected from Misa, since the girl didn't have the trust issues and healthy skepticism that Naomi herself had and that she was used to seeing from her coworkers. She believed things easily and Naomi hesitated to say it was because she was unintelligent. She just seemed to naturally take others at face value more often than not.

Still, Naomi wasn't going to get carried away by thinking that Misa completely bought the lie and get too comfortable. She wasn't going to jump the gun on this. "Yes, it was a test. Again, I'm sorry for deceiving you, but I hope you understand that it was L's orders." The comm device was quiet in her ear as they listened to her work.

"What were you testing for?" Misa asked.

What kind of thing would someone part of the cult of Kira expect to be tested for? Naomi wasn't expecting her to ask that, but she rolled with it. "Firstly, to make sure that you were determined to meet L and secondly, to get to know you to make sure you aren't a danger to him. L values his privacy and he has a lot of enemies. I didn't expect you to

see through the deception, though."

"Did I pass?? I swear, you've never met anyone who's more grateful to Kira than I am!" Misa lurched forward to grab her hands and it took *everything* Naomi had not to flinch back and rip her hands away. She imagined her smile looked much more forced in those moments, but Misa didn't seem to notice.

"Yes, you passed. I can tell how much you care about Kira and you gained brownie points both for realizing that L was Kira and for realizing that I wasn't L. I came here today to let you know that L has given his consent for you to meet him. Would you like to come with me now?" Naomi hoped pushing ahead with the offer would distract Misa from any doubts she might have.

"Really?!" Misa shrieked excitedly, jumping up and down. She stopped suddenly as something occurred to her. "But…how will I know if the L I meet today is the real one or just another fake?" Actually an intelligent question.

"You'll know." Naomi smiled, more to herself this time. "L is quite unlike anyone you've ever met before."

Sheer Destruction

Chapter Summary

> Because love is the most fun when it results in something burning down.

Chapter Notes

> To my readers who read my notes, please I need advice. I've made allusions to it before, but I've actually been writing fanfic for a long time. A solid decade now, actually; I've been posting stories since early high school. I started writing over on fanfiction.net and that's where I stayed writing until I slowly moved over to AO3. I haven't double-posted anything up until this point, so looking at it now, my fics have become segregated in a way.
>
> I want advice on whether I should move (or copy) all my fics from fanfic.net to my account here on AO3 or if I should keep them separated. Most of them are for my favorite anime, which funnily enough, is not Death Note, despite this being my most popular story to date, and many of them are older stories so they may be quite different from what I've posted here. Anyways, I'd appreciate it if you guys let me know what you think because I could use it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

L truly despised working as part of a team.

It was loathsome to have to justify each of the actions he took and what he was thinking with each move. It was an annoyance, at best, and a hindrance, at worst. It was similarly aggravating to him that he had to admit that Misora was right when she said that they needed each other to find Light. If B really had kidnapped Light, then Amane might be the key to figuring out where he is, and he needed Misora to lure Amane back here. If B didn't take Light…L truly hoped that was not the case. B was troublesome, but a known individual. If Light was taken by an unknown without a trace, it would be substantially more difficult.

Agreeing to meet with Misa himself was yet another move that he'd had to justify, to his consternation. It wasn't as if he took allowing others to see his face lightly and they should know that. Perhaps even that was overestimating the majority of the group's intelligence. Misa - much like Light and the select members of the JPD - was a unique case. Her being stubborn about providing information about her relationship with B was a factor, but more important was that - if she'd seen B - she'd already seen a face nearly identical to L's. The sheet that Misora had handed her could have doubled as a list of L's own characteristics with some minor changes. If she believed him to be Kira, then he could use that to manipulate her and get the information he needed to find Light.

He'd ordered her to be driven in circles and for Watari to take several wrong turns on the way back when he'd sent him out for her. It was an unacceptable risk that she might be able to determine where they were located. To that end, he'd also insisted she be blindfolded until she was on their hotel floor. Truthfully, the team's worries about Amane being a danger to L weren't entirely unfounded, but she was still just an obsessive young woman, idealizing Kira, like many others in their society at the moment.

She hadn't shown violent tendencies in the past, aside from her attention-seeking stunt and no one had gotten hurt during that. Watari had confirmed that she didn't have any weapons or tracking devices on her when he picked her up. L severely doubted she was the serious threat by herself, as long as she believed he was her precious Kira. What she *was* was a resource. B was never *careful* , per se, but he never took risks that could undo all his work. Like he'd been trained. Amane could make the difference.

The girl was a resource he could use to find Light if B had been the one to take him. L sincerely hoped that would be the case. If it had been a mysterious past love of Light's behind this, L could already tell that it would be like looking for a ghost. Meanwhile, Light was either being incredibly charming or annoying his kidnapper greatly. If L's experience was anything to go by, he could be doing both. L couldn't conceptualize the idea that he wouldn't find Light or that it would be too late when he did.

L had to find Light. He *had* to, because..!

Kira can kill without a name…

Kira can kill without a name…

KIRA CAN KILL WITHOUT A NAME!

Because everything he'd been so desperately clinging to had disappeared from his grip.

L had lied to himself. Even as he held Light's hand and took him on dates, he'd lied to himself. That his feelings for Light hadn't gone too far yet. That Light would still choose his own survival over L's if given the chance, no matter what he felt.

He'd made the most critical mistake that an investigator *could* make.

He'd ignored information coming in that contradicted what he wanted to believe. No, he hadn't ignored it. He'd trivialized it. He'd insisted that the things his brain was picking up on weren't serious; weren't important. And that was a mistake he should've known better than to make. Now that Light was gone, possibly in danger despite all he had done as Kira, L felt sickeningly like he was crawling out of his skin. It was a constant state of uneasiness, although that term felt too weak to describe what L was actually experiencing. Before, L had insisted to himself that Light occupied all of his thoughts because he was the criminal L needed to catch and only for that reason.

He wondered now if that was ever fully true.

A knock on the room he'd moved to for their meeting jerked L from his thoughts. "Ms. Amane." Watari announced, leading her into the room.

Amane was visibly calm, even with her eyes blinded and her hands tied behind her back, which Watari now bent at the waist to untie. As soon as the bindings on her hands were undone, the elderly man reached up to take the blindfold off, as well. The man was wearing a mask because unlike L himself, Watari had no need to show Amane his face and it would only be a potential hindrance in the future. As soon as the blindfold was off, Watari took it and left quietly. This left L staring at Misa and Misa blinking owlishly at him as her vision was restored.

L could understand why people online often spoke about how beautiful Misa was. She had wide blue eyes and long, shiny blonde hair and delicate features. L couldn't empathize with being attracted to her, but he could acknowledge that she had many attractive traits. Although…

"Oh…" Amane let out, placing her hands over her mouth and looking around the room in confusion. "Do you work for L, too?"

…there was nothing less attractive to L than someone who was clearly an idiot. *Not like Light,* the thought crossed L's mind and he pushed it away a second later. He needed to focus, right now. "Actually, I *am* L." He told her. "And I'm not the person you met before, if you've met someone who looks very much like me, as I suspect you have. Though I'm sure only our appearances are alike."

"Uh…oh…you are?" Her face fell as she processed this information. "I mean, you aren't--uh…"

Ah, there was the disappointment he was used to from the few individuals who had met him in person. It was unavoidable. His wasn't the image anyone had in their mind when they imagined either L or Kira, which was unfortunate because to match with the beliefs she currently harbored, he would need to be both. Regardless, L had read plenty from Kira supporters online to know what to say to her.

"That's a fine way to greet your God. You're receiving the honor of meeting me directly, after all." Because that is what many Kira supporters had taken to calling him. An avenging god that would strike down the wicked in the service of their believers. A cult, for all that Kira didn't seem to be trying to feed into that godlike view some held.

"Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to be rude, I just--" Amane backstepped.

"You were shocked to see my appearance." L cut her off. "I know what you're feeling, although why I should look normal when I am so beyond it is itself beyond me. After all, wasn't it I who saved you from the evil man that took everything from you? You've devoted yourself to me because you recognize the absolute justice of my great mission…or have I misjudged you?"

L personally knew that Kira didn't speak that way, but he knew what Amane would be wanting. She *wanted* someone who felt larger than life, dominating and in-control. It was important that he act in a way she expected Kira to, at least in their initial meeting. They'd already tricked her once before with a false L.

"Of course I am!" Amane's expression brightened in an instant. "I'll always be devoted to you for saving my life the way you did, Kira! Even if you're not what I imagined, you're just like your monologue on that video!"

L shoved down the discomfort he felt at being called Kira. L had already texted Soichiro after Watari picked Amane up, stating that he and Amane would be speaking alone and that he wanted the rest of the team to go with Watari afterwards to the surveillance room. Allowing her to see that they're alone in the room was the most expedient method to trick Amane into believing that he trusts her. That, in turn, would make her more eager to divulge the information he needed.

"It's good that you've noticed the similarity between myself now and in my video earlier this year. Though I must know, how did you know she wasn't the true L?" L inquired, determined to avoid the same mistakes that Misora made. L also wished to probe deeper into Amane's beliefs that he and Kira were the same person - and thus how things like his video confrontation with Kira appeared to her - but he must pace himself. He couldn't afford to get distracted from his main goal now.

"I'm not sure." Misa blinked with wide eyes. "She just didn't feel like Kira after a while."

L's eye twitched. That wasn't helpful. Not in the slightest. "You really can't think of a single reason?" That couldn't possibly be true, since she chose to work with B over it.

"Well…" Misa drew off, looking like she was thinking very hard. "She just didn't act like she believed in Kira's mission."

Huh. Now that's interesting, L thought. It was true that Misora wouldn't believe in Kira's actions, since she was actively working to catch him. It might have been that something in her acting was just off enough that Amane was able to pick up on it, as dull as she was.

Briefly, L wondered whether he would be able to do better, before someone with golden eyes flashed in his mind. Or rather, he remembered many conversations with that golden-eyed individual as they explained their feelings at length. Losing himself a little in the memories, L's mouth opened. "It can be difficult for some people to put their beliefs into words properly and it may make them seem less faithful than they actually are. Kira's actions have saved many people who were cast aside by an ineffective system that's just as likely to protect the aggressors in a crime rather than the victims. The legal system is deeply flawed and it is too hesitant to act, so Kira does the service of acting for them, without the bureaucratic red tape holding them back." That was absolutely something the real Kira would say. After all, the real Kira had said it to him directly.

Amane's eyes grew even wider while he was speaking and it was almost as if she was emitting glitter as she looked at him like he was a god. No, THE God. "You truly are him!" She crowed, leaping up to hug him. L deftly - and with some panic - dodged her hug attempt, leaving her to faceplant on the floor.

Something foul rose in L's chest towards the girl. He hadn't liked her before, but now she was really starting to annoy him. However, he refused to show his emotions. They would be nothing but a hindrance in this situation. "I'm glad we could establish that I am both L and Kira. Now, Misa, I could use your help."

"You mean there really is something I can do to help you?" Misa cried with excitement. Even her voice was grating to L's ears, but he pushed past it.

"Absolutely." L said. "There is a person I need assistance tracking down. We've mentioned him to you multiple times already today. The person whose description matches my own and that has been causing me immeasurable trouble lately. I'm not sure which name he gave you, but we know him simply as B."

"B…" Amane whispered to herself. The name didn't seem familiar to her, but she didn't look confused about who he was talking about, either.

"Have you met someone like that?" L probed. Regardless of what they *knew* she'd done, he needed access to what they didn't know and it was beneficial to allow her to make the admission herself. "I feel I should inform you now: that person wants me dead."

"I helped someone who wants to kill you?!" Amane cried out, looking horrified. "I didn't think it would be that big of a deal! I swear, if I'd thought--!"

"You didn't think *what* would be a big deal?" L interrupted her, impatiently. He could tell that if he let her, she would continue going on in an unproductive manner. He didn't want excuses or justifications.

"Well…" Amane fidgeted, flustered. "A while ago, a guy who looked almost exactly like you - really, are you guys twins? - came up to me on the street. He acted like he knew me and I thought he might be one of my stalkers. I was even in disguise that day, so I don't know how he recognized me…but then, he started talking about how he knew I was a follower of Kira! He knew about the meetings I've been going to with…uh…" She glanced questioningly at L.

"My assistant." L supplied, staying away from providing any names. Misora already provided Misa her alias, that would have to be enough.

Amane nodded. "Right! So that's what got me to listen to him. He said he wasn't L, but that he knew how to contact you and he had a stunt in mind that would get your attention. He said he wanted to meet you, too." She mumbled the last part underneath her breath.

That was about what L had suspected had happened. B had basically told her he knew she was a fan of Kira's and provided her with a chance at getting Kira's attention, the thing she's made it clear she wanted from the beginning.

Of course, he did. In hindsight, them choosing to ghost Amane had given B the opening he needed to weasel his way in by promising her what she wanted. Which he would have known because L had already established that he'd hacked into their systems. That meant that - up until his kidnapping stunt - he had access to the information they'd accumulated about Misa. However, that did beg the question…. "What was it that he'd asked you to do?" She certainly must have had a use to B, otherwise he wouldn't have put in the effort to recruit her as he did.

"The only thing he'd had me help with was recruiting." Amane said.

"Please explain." L said, immediately.

"Remember that man you killed during that video call?" She asked, glancing around the empty room. "Well, he was a fan of mine. He said he needed help with his plan. He needed a nobody that wasn't anything special to be in front of the camera. He needed me to find someone and convince them and he suggested I use my fame to do it. He said that not many people would be okay with what he wanted them to do, but rabid fans could get pretty desperate. I set up an autograph session with a raffle and he told me how to pick a good one out of the people who showed up." She explained.

Meanwhile, L took in the new information. It wasn't what he'd expected, but it fit in well with what he'd already known. The picture became much clearer as he slotted the puzzle pieces into place.

B had a plan to induce Light to kill by taking L's successors hostage and threatening their lives, but although B couldn't keep his involvement a secret, he couldn't be the one doing the killing. If he'd done that, Light could and would have simply killed B to save the boys. B didn't want to set himself up as the one doing the killing. His solution? To hire someone else to do it, but it wasn't as if he could put out a "Help Wanted" ad. And even if he could've discreetly sent out feelers for someone willing to do the job, he'd likely only turn up people with pre-existing records, making it more likely Kira would already know of them.

It had become clear that what B really wanted to achieve with his stunt was to prove that Kira could kill without a name. So it was incredibly important for the person to be, as Amane put it, a nobody. Someone that Kira wouldn't know. Obviously finding out about Amane due to his hacking endeavors, B decided to use her to solve his problems. He'd coached her on how to find a desperate, unstable fan to bait Kira for him.

"So how come he looks so much like you if he isn't?" Amane asked, tactlessly.

"He was attempting to mock me." Conveniently, that was both the truth and something that would make Amane more upset with B and more likely to help him. "He does know me or at least *of* me and has access to information few others possess. He also despises me, so I am sure taking on my appearance and tricking one of my loyal followers into assisting him in his plot against me was very amusing to him."

"What a jerk!" Amane cried out, fisting her hands. She looked more like a toddler throwing a tantrum than someone becoming violently angry. "I can't believe I helped him!"

"Indeed." *And you've clearly learned nothing, considering how easily you believe me about being Kira,* L thought with some amusement. However, as illuminating as this extraneous information was, it wasn't what he

needed to know.

"So now," L said, leaning forward. "I need to know where he's hiding.

~ ❶ ~

L didn't know where he was. He'd gone looking for Light and he'd ended up…somewhere.

He glanced around. There were no buildings, no landmarks…nothing.

The area around him was completely dark and he couldn't hear his own voice over the sound of howling wind in the distance. The howling was deafening, almost enough to drown out L's own *thoughts*. But not quite.

He knew he needed to find Light; he was here somewhere. He didn't think about how he knew that. But as he glanced around, L had no idea where he could look. As far as he could see, there was nothing well into the distance. Lacking a plan, L just decided to start walking. Except, the second he did so, he immediately tripped harshly over something and it sent him tumbling to the ground.

What…what did he trip over? L wondered that as he pulled himself up from the ground. There hadn't been anything to even trip over.

But as he looked back, suddenly there was. Light's prone body was laid out on the ground where it absolutely hadn't been before and that was what L had tripped over. L practically threw himself at Light's body, frantically checking his vitals and trying to get a response from him, all of his previous calculations gone in an instant. Light didn't

move. He was cold to the touch and L couldn't pick up a pulse.

L's hand started to shake and he tried to call out Light's name, but the words caught in his throat. He couldn't speak. Any attempts he made to find signs of life brought forth nothing and L nearly lost himself completely to grief and panic. L didn't realize he had started hugging Light close until he heard words whispered into his ear. Jerking away to look back at Light as he held the younger man in his arms and Light's eyes were open. However, his eyes weren't their usual gold but instead a milky white.

L held still, entranced, as Light slowly reached up a hand to touch L's cheek. The chill of Light's skin leached out of him and sunk beneath L's skin. Light leaned forward slightly, closing the space between them that L had created. "Do--" Light's voice sounded rough and gargled. Was it because he was on the brink of death…or because he'd come back from it? "Do you know where I am?"

Suddenly, L's eyes caught the brief flash of a knife coming at Light. "Light!" L cried out as he lurched forward to defend him--and then L was on the floor in a hotel room. L breathed heavily, needing an undefined amount of time before he got his bearings.

Right. He was in one of the rooms on the floor he'd rented at their most recent hotel. It should have been a relief that he wasn't… wherever his dream self was and that it had all just been a dream, but he couldn't feel any of it. The detective couldn't get rid of the lingering fear that the dream had given him: that when he found Light, it wouldn't be alive.

Or perhaps rather than giving me the fear, it just made me aware of one I already possessed. L thought. He knew a substantial amount about several different branches of science, including the study of dreams and he couldn't dismiss the likelihood that the latter was the correct case.

L settled into his usual sitting position - not bothering to rise from the floor - looking for some comfort in the wake of the unsettling dream. His nails dug deeply into his leg, the thick jeans he was wearing preventing him from drawing blood. He recognized dimly that the nightmare had affected him badly. *I shouldn't have let Misora and Matsuda talk me into taking a nap* , L thought with some irritation. After the meeting with Amane, he'd been obliged to meet back up with the rest of the group and strategize.

Getting information from Amane proved very difficult and aggravating. She was fully willing to help him, but it became evident that she had asked few, if any, questions to B as they'd gone about his plan. When she'd asked questions, she didn't pry when he gave her limited responses. That meant there was frustratingly little she could tell him and L found himself with the annoying yet familiar task of pulling information from her sieve of a mind. He expected that she would not have much information, given that B is adept at manipulation from his years of training at Wammy's while Amane was just a fool. However, for her to have taken part in the kidnapping, B couldn't have prevented her from knowing *anything* and L could achieve magnitudes with very little information.

And he was very motivated to do so now.

After nearly an hour of secretly interrogating the model, this was what he had: Amane didn't know where B was or how to contact him. She *did* , however, know what the building was that they'd taken the boys to.

At that point, L had admittedly become exceedingly frustrated and was thinking about how useless Misa was. Knowing the building they were held hostage at was only marginally better than having nothing. L knew the kind of children Wammy's house raised, B would absolutely not have taken hostages to his nest. No, he would've taken them to a different location, expecting that taking four different people there and recording the interior then sending it to the

investigative team would compromise it. Even if they did find the building, B likely wouldn't have returned there after the recording and even more likely, he scrubbed the building of evidence after the incident.

But just as L was ready to try another method of inquiry, Amane piped up with something. "Oh! I forgot! When we were setting the building up, I noticed something weird on his shoes."

"Something weird?" L repeated with only mild interest.

"Yeah! It was wet cement."

L's thoughts froze and then sped up. "Wet. Cement."

It wasn't a question but prompted an answer. "Well, it wasn't wet when I *saw* it." She bounced, excitedly. "But you know how when you're walking down the street and they're adding new cement to part of the walkway, you can sometimes get some on your shoes and it hardens later? That's what it looked like happened to him, only instead of just getting it on the tip of his shoe, both of his shoes looked like nearly the whole bottoms had dried cement on them. Like he'd stepped directly on it…" That was a strangely strong observation, from her.

L was already turning over the possibilities, even as he listened to her. The building B took Amane to might not have been his nest, but the cement could have come from the real location. If that was the case, then it was currently their best evidence towards B's physical location. After making sure that she had no further information of relevance, he'd sent her home for the day. Watari would drive her back, of course.

Amane willingly allowed herself to be blindfolded after extracting a promise from him that she wouldn't be ghosted again. Ordinarily, he would've thought her extra foolish for trusting any promise L made, but in this case, he intended to keep it. He'd seen how willing B was to take that as an opening, after all. Privately, he wondered if Light would've been kidnapped if B hadn't managed to get to Amane.

After their meeting, the team agreed to start looking for buildings with or near ongoing construction, but Misora and Matsuda had made it their mission to convince him to take a short nap, insisting that he looked "more exhausted than usual". Perhaps his thought process really had become compromised, because he'd allowed them to convince him to take a rest while they looked for the building. Clearly, that had been a grave error.

L rarely slept - only when he had to - but he was absolutely certain he wouldn't do so again for the duration of Light's kidnapping. The nightmare he'd just endured had been borderline tortuous in a way that he did not wish to unpack so soon afterwards.

One thing he was sure of was that he would likely have a repeat performance if he went to sleep again.

~ ❶ ~

L spent the rest of his time after his unfortunate attempt at rest deliberately not thinking about his nightmare by monitoring the ongoing research into construction going on anywhere in the Kanto region. Before his nap, he'd looked into it and made a list of all sites currently under construction and the rest of the team were by that time out in the field, separated into smaller groups. Each team had taken a few locations from the list and drove to the addresses to check if there were any abandoned buildings in the surrounding areas.

L impressed upon them the importance of being *discrete.* The worst thing they could do at this time was tipping B off if they were indeed getting close. To that end, L hurriedly recalled Matsuda when he realized he'd gone out into the field, as well. The man was utterly incapable of subtlety; he'd blow the whole operation sky high, given the slightest opportunity.

The next *several* hours some of the most agonizing L had ever experienced. He was more than familiar with being excited to see the results of a line of investigation. Many cases had interested him enough that he was on pins and needles to see the outcome of one of his plans. This was different. The ticking clock that usually made him compete to catch a criminal before they escaped now felt like an anxious *need* to progress.

The aggravating itching beneath his skin that whispered to him that *Light could be there.* L felt as if he was fighting for his sanity. It was through sheer force of will that L didn't allow himself to act impulsively. He knew the folly of doing so, even as the anxiety in his brain nearly drowned the logic out. With deliberate carefulness, L instructed the individual teams on surveying their areas in tandem, without pressuring them to rush. They would need time to do it properly, otherwise they might slip up or miss something. L seamlessly switched between the groups, recording their observations and looking up additional details to provide assistance. When memories of the nightmare began to creep in against his will, he shoved himself even deeper into his work.

Their efforts and his supreme patience were rewarded when - at nearly six pm - they managed to find two buildings that could work as the place B was using as his base of operations. They'd set up a team to watch both locations, but the building that would end up being the correct one was set behind a construction project that had been put on hold recently due to permit issues.

The building was currently surrounded by the construction site, even though the building itself was not under construction. As a result, the building was only accessible by going *through* the site. That explained

how B had gotten the cement on his shoes. He must have picked it up when the construction was still active. Having work going on would have limited B's mobility in and out of the building, so it wouldn't have been strange for him to choose to come and go at night, at least some of the time. Once night fell, construction would have ceased for the day, but B would've had limited visibility to avoid obstacles. Like wet cement.

Now that construction in the area had been paused for the moment, however, that was no longer a barrier for him. It also made it harder for L's team to get close enough to observe the building without standing out like a group of sore thumbs. They were obliged to observe from a distance, hidden in a nearby building with an adequate vantage point and binoculars.

Matsuda's suggestion that they attach a camera to a dog's collar and send it towards the abandoned building was promptly shut down. It took the better part of the day to find the building and it took the entirety of the night and the next morning for the team camping out there to see B show up. They'd nearly missed him. He was apparently without much of the makeup he used to look more like L and he'd been covering his face.

L had spent the time that they were lying in wait to see if B would show up thinking about what he was going to do when they found him. B showing up confirmed they had the right building, but that left him with the task of deciding the best way to determine if Light was there and rescuing him if he was. In another situation, L would have waited until B left again, having half the team ready to jump and arrest him while the others went into the building to find the victim.

But what if he harmed Light while L waited for him to leave? What if he evaded capture outside, which was a high possibility, and Light wasn't being kept in the building itself? L would have lost the chance to interrogate B and Light would have been lost to him a second time. And so L found himself coming to the conviction that he would need to confront B directly. A dark, angry part of him that seemingly cropped up overnight relished the idea, but the rest of him looked at

the situation clinically.

He would go in alone. B was undoubtedly keeping a watch over what happened outside. In the likely event that he saw them coming, he was least likely to run if he saw L coming without company. His beef with L would all but ensure that he accepted a direct confrontation with the detective. Besides that, L didn't want witnesses to their confrontation. L would distract B while the entire rest of the team surrounded the building in case he tried to run.

He wasn't concerned about his own safety while confronting B alone. L was more than capable of taking care of himself in a physical altercation.

All this found L carefully picking his way through the dormant construction site. He didn't bother to hide his approach. As expected, B didn't attempt to take off, but instead of staying in the building, he came out the front entrance to meet L.

"L!" B crowed jubilantly upon seeing him. "Or is it still Ryuzaki? What brings you here to my humble abode? Congratulations on finding it, by the way!"

"B." L said through the anger he felt at seeing the man's smile. He kept the anger under control, although not without significant effort. "Let's take this inside." It wasn't a question, but B took the time to stand there and deliberately thought about it, anyway.

"Alright. Have it your way~" B crooned, stepping back into the building without breaking eye contact. L didn't glance behind himself, trusting that his team would stay out of sight until he and B were in the building. "Well, here we are." B smirked after L followed him into the building, holding his arms out wide.

L truly hadn't realized how close to the edge he was until that smirk pushed him straight off of it and L leapt forward, grabbing B's shirt and shoving him harshly into the wall behind him. The impact sent shards of wood flying from the dilapidated structure. Contrary to L's expectations, B didn't fight back immediately. He just coughed, though whether that was because of the impact he made with the wall or the dust particles floating in the air, L neither knew nor cared.

"Woah, okay, someone's frustrated." Even with the coughs still tapering off as he spoke, B still managed to sound smug. L didn't reply and B took a better look at him. "No…you're not frustrated, you're *angry* ." B sounded both delighted and awed.

L sucked in a breath in an attempt to calm down, telling himself like a mantra that his emotions were making him too easy to read…and promptly slammed B into the wall again, harder than last time. Apparently, the mantra wasn't working. After the second blow, B apparently had enough of just taking it. B brought his hands up quickly and wrapped each hand around one of L's wrists and kicked L in the stomach a fraction of a second later.

L stumbled back, but he caught himself and ducked as B threw a punch that had been aimed at his face. L's foot shot straight up and cracked into B's skull. B was well-trained, albeit not as good as L himself was. Even if the blow took him by surprise, he moved with the force, minimizing its impact.

B was back on L a second later, but L was ready. When B threw a punch aimed at his face, L grabbed the man's arm, misdirecting it. The fist went past L's face while he aimed an elbow at B's. A sickening crack sounded in the room, accompanied by the two men's heavy breathing. Blood dripped onto the floor as B held his nose.

L didn't give him the space to breathe, instead aiming for another

kick. This time, at the man's leg. This blow didn't end in a fracture, but it did end with a cry of pain as B tumbled to the ground. A high-pitched clanging sound drowned out L's rage for just a moment. His eyes shot to where the sound came from and saw a key on the ground right next to B. B leapt forward and body slammed L, taking advantage of his momentary distraction and sending the detective flying and rolling several feet on the ground.

L was obliged to dodge as B grabbed one of the few pieces of furniture in the room and threw it at him. L got out of the way as the furniture broke into several pieces against the spot he'd been in, but cut himself on a rusty nail protruding from the wall as he went. The jagged cut on his arm burned, but L ignored it, pushing forward.

"Don't you want your key?" L asked, hoping to distract him and noting the key was still across the floor.

B was breathing even heavier than L was and even though he was standing, it was clear B was favoring one leg over the other. B didn't even glance at the key. "Not my key."

"It tumbled out of your pocket when you fell." L pointed out, dryly.

B's face scrunched up. "I don't have a key." He insisted with the lie.

Just then, a set of bangs came from somewhere upstairs. L’s gaze flicked to the ceiling and then back to B, sharpening.

“Probably just the building settling.” B volunteered, not entirely looking like he believed that.

The sound wasn’t so distinct as to be immediately clear what the cause was, but he knew it wasn’t the sound a settling building made. He lurched forward, straight at B. B grabbed L by the arm as he got close, looking like he was about to break it. Or attempt to. L knew better than to allow that. He used the motion to grab onto B's arm, in turn, and pull it towards him, taking B's body with it. And then he brought up a knee, slamming it into B's stomach with as much force as he could.

Then L was on his feet and racing towards the stairs to the second floor. He had something more important than B, right now. He didn't stop as he passed by the key, swooping it up as he ran and shoving it into his pocket.

L made his way up the set of stairs to the second floor as quickly as he could while being careful not to fall through said stairs. Like the rest of the building, they were crumbling with several holes throughout. When L burst onto the second floor, he was met with a long hallway leading into several different rooms. He steadied himself, closed his eyes, and listened. His heart began to beat harder as the seconds ticked by and he didn't hear anything, but then he heard a bang from one of the nearby rooms. L was running as soon as he heard it, slamming into the room.

The room was empty but no less destroyed than the first floor. L's eyes narrowed in on a door on a side wall that was nearly obscured by the glare of the sunlight filtered in through a broken window. L was at that small door in an instant. The handle turned easily in his hand and the door swung open. And then there was Light. Sitting on the floor of the closet, tied up with tape over his mouth.

A sound behind him had L's head whipping around to face the entrance to the room, his gaze settling on B, who was standing in the doorway with his mouth hanging open. His eyes were fixed on Light for a moment, then his eyes flicked to L, then back to Light. And then he was running away, back in the direction of the stairs.

The urge to chase B lanced through him, along with his rage, but it was gone a second later. Light came first. The team was waiting outside and Watari was with them, they would handle B. L checked Light's arms, noting that they were handcuffed. The key that B had dropped earlier flashed through his mind. L fished it out and held Light's wrists with his other hand as he tried the key in the lock, trying not to become distracted by the feel of Light's skin and the heat that seeped from it into L's cold fingers.

The key worked and the cuffs clicked open. Light's hands shot up as soon as they were able. L thought for a brief flash that Light was going to hug him but instead, Light pulled the tape off his mouth harshly without flinching and then he was yelling, "We need to get out of here! This place is gonna blow! He rigged this place with explosives!"

L stared at Light. The detective's mind couldn't wrap itself around the words that just came out of Light's mouth…and then in an instant, it did.

L shot up from the crouch he'd dropped into beside Light, yanking the younger man up with him. Keeping ahold of Light's arm, L rushed to the doorway. *Explosives,* he'd said. L's mind whirled, even as he worked to get Light to safety as fast as he could. If the urgency in Light's voice was any indicator, they needed out of the building *now.* If B had the capability to set off the explosives at that moment, he would surely do so now that L and Light were both in the building.

They were out in the hallway and Light had sped up, now running ahead of L and pulling him along desperately. "Come on! Come on! We need to *go!* "

The two of them were down the stairs and sprinting across the first floor in record time. The door was hanging open and the two threw themselves through the opening. Both tumbled to the rough ground in a tangle of limbs and dust. A single second ticked by. And then L rolled up onto his feet, once again hauling Light up with him. *We're*

too close, L thought. He technically qualified as an explosives expert and his priority remained getting Light to safety. They were nowhere near safe yet.

L had no way of knowing what the minimum safe distance was without knowing the explosives used, but the preferable distance remained the same for all explosions: as far as possible.

Startling him, Light suddenly grabbed L by the shoulders and threw him to the side, behind a bulldozer. Light's body immediately followed as he threw himself on top of L. There was a piercing silence. And then there was an explosion.

The entire building exploded violently and shrapnel went flying; splintering pieces of wood, metal, and concrete going everywhere. L could hear the smaller pieces pinging harshly against their cover at high speeds. The larger ones had yet to reach them, but L was taking no chances. He placed his hands on Light's back and wrapped his legs around his and then he flipped them so that he was now on top, protecting Light from any impact. Light made an effort to push L off or reverse their positions again, but L kept him pinned and their legs entwined. That was how he rode out the immediate aftermath of the explosion; on top of Light, staring directly into those wide, golden eyes that a part of him had been intensely worried he'd never see again. When the debris stopped falling, L waited a full two minutes before he finally untangled himself from the boy beneath him and slid off of him.

L took the opportunity of a respite from the action to consider the situation. One thought shoved forward ahead of all others. He hadn't warned Watari about the explosion in his haste to get Light and himself out of the building. None of the rest of the team had been supposed to enter the building, but that meant less than nothing in light of how things ended up. L fished around in his pockets for his phone, forgetting which pocket it was in. Once he had it in his hand, he immediately caught sight of a number of text messages from Watari, growing progressively more alarmed.

The texts informed L that Watari and the rest of the group attempted to arrest B when he'd run out of the building. He gave them the slip initially, they gave chase, and caught him. The next handful of messages were panicked questions about the explosion and if L was alright and that they were coming back. L let the phone drop. He could inform Watari of everything that happened when he got there. It was as he did so that he realized Light hadn't gotten up. He was still lying on his back, now with his eyes closed. L felt a flash of concern. It occurred to L that he'd never checked Light for injuries before now. Light didn't appear to have any serious wounds, though the explosion had left the both of them looking a little worse for wear, but L knew exactly how misleading that could be.

"Light?" L shuffled so he was at Light's side, leaning over him and looking his body over with a critical eye.

Light's eyes slid open and a slight, tired smirk pulled at his lips. "We're alive." He huffed out a laugh that was heavy with a variety of emotions. "My hero." This was followed by his placing his hand on the back of L's neck and pulling him down so that the detective's lips met his own.

It would be inaccurate to say that L's train of thought ground to a halt. It was more accurate to state that his train of thought hit the brakes, derailed, and went careening off the side of a cliff, ending up as a pile of wreckage at the bottom. For once in his life, there wasn't a single thought occupying his head. All L could focus on was the feel of Light's lips on his. It was warm. It made L feel warm.

L's hands wrapped around Light's shoulders. He didn't remember making the conscious decision to kiss Light back, but he was doing it. He could feel Light beneath him…

This was L's first kiss. It made him feel…he wasn't sure, but it wasn't

unpleasant. Very not unpleasant. L had the sudden urge to close his eyes - to better focus on how the kiss felt. At another time, he would ignore the impulse, but he let his eyes slide closed.

And that's how L's night ended. With a lingering kiss that seared into his heart while the flames from the burning wreckage behind them seared into his back.

Chapter End Notes

> You can probably tell how I view Misa through my interpretation of her here. That is, I view her as neither particularly smart, nor an absolute idiot. More naïve and with a borderline inability to think about things in depth, than anything else. One thing that sticks out to me is how much L was able to manipulate her in canon. She went from hating him as someone who imprisoned them (calling him a pervert, too) to saying that he really does understand her and suggesting they all be friends. And why? Because he knew what to say to win her over. Things like praising her devotion to Light. She's clearly someone who doesn't second-guess things when someone tells her what she wants to hear (again, naïve and lacking depth but not necessarily dumb) and L knew how to do that. So, I'm trying to channel that element of their relationship here.

The Truth

Chapter Summary

The truth shall set ye free...and make things very complicated.

Chapter Notes

Happy birthday, The_Dilara4951!!! I hope your day is lovely. Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next several hours were a flurry of activity.

After his and L's kiss, the pair of Watari and Naomi descended on them from seemingly nowhere. There was surprise that Light was with L, shock that the building behind them was on fire, worry that either or both of them were hurt, and a medley of so many other emotions that it was a challenge to pick up on as he was pulled along by everyone's emotions.

"It's okay. You're okay, now." She whispered into his hair as she pulled him into her arms. She muttered about telling his dad, looking about as harried and flustered as could be expected in this situation. He hadn't seen her like that since her fiancé was kidnapped. The thought was accompanied by a flash of guilt.

Right. His dad wasn't there. Light glanced around. Ryuk told him that his dad was one of the people surrounding the building, but probably took B into custody. Ryuk wasn't sure, since he was paying more attention to Light and L than the people outside.

The Shinigami in question was currently laughing his head off. Ryuk had been more serious than Light was used to while they were keying up for the explosion, but now that it was over, the Shinigami seemed to be having the time of his life. "Even in your first life, you didn't

explode a whole building!" The Shinigami cackled.

Okay, but a building did explode in my past life. I just didn't directly cause it , Light thought but couldn't say aloud.

The Shinigami was still going. "You've gotten more crazy, not less!" Light didn't appreciate aspersions being cast on his sanity. Especially since Ryuk went along with it easily enough.

When L pulled away to speak to Watari, Light found himself instinctively reaching out for him and stopping himself. Instead, he turned to Naomi. "Did you catch him?"

The detective nodded, her face set in a serious frown even then. He imagined the events leading up to this moment made it difficult for her to take satisfaction in their achievement. "He's being detained right now. Tonight was our best chance to find him and bring him in." And find you. The last part was implied but left unsaid. They both knew. Of course, Light knew that their best chance of arresting B was that night. It was what he'd intended when he'd decided to plant explosives in B's hideout, after all.

What better way to smoke a rat out of its hole than to pump some predators in? Then, once he'd done that, the next best thing he could do was to block up the hole - or in this case, blow it up - so the rat couldn't go and skitter back into it later on down the line. Light vindictively hoped that Beyond was feeling the heat on him, needing to run around the district in broad daylight, with a group of police on him and nowhere to hide.

He'd really wanted B to get caught immediately, but he knew better than to bank on that. That's why Light had hoped B would sustain some injuries when fleeing the explosion. If B did evade the officers outside as he fled, an injury would hamper his progress to the point

where it would be impossible for the team not to catch him immediately afterwards, but the absolute coward got out of the building before he did. B didn't know about the explosions, but still…

At any rate, now that B had been arrested, Light had a moment to think about his next move. The most important things he'd needed to do was stop B from being able to hurt anyone else for the foreseeable future and to destroy the piece of the Death Note that B had. The arrest would help with the former and the explosion accomplished the latter. Light was very sure that B didn't take the time to grab his page of the Death Note from where he hid it in the building. Light severely doubted that B happened to have the page on him at the time and that meant it was in the building.

The building that had just been blown sky-high.

He'd suspected B wouldn't be carrying it on his person since that would make it easier to steal the paper if he was found. Instead, Light waited until he saw the hiding place B had for it. Really well done, by the way. It was actually in the wall, hidden in the batting. It wasn't easy to find, even once you knew where it was. The man must have an excellent memory.

Light didn't want to risk tipping off B that he knew where the spot was and even though he could have sent Ryuk to grab the thing, all invisible, it still left B with a place to hide. Light could come back and claim that B kidnapped him and lead them back to the building, but the risk that B would see them coming and manage to escape was huge. Besides that, there would be no evidence that anyone besides B had ever been in the building, willingly or otherwise. Maybe if Light could injure him, he could…

That was how Light settled on blowing up the building. With a very controlled and localized explosion, of course. It would destroy the paper wherever in the building it was, it would rob Beyond of his

hiding spot and force him to find a new one while they were all looking for him, and it had the chance of injuring him in the process. Sounded like a good idea to Light. He wasn't worried about Beyond dying, the man was like a cockroach.

Of course, destroying the stray piece of his note and getting B arrested weren't his reason for blaming B for kidnapping him and hiding in the building; it was just why he blew it up. He'd just needed a scapegoat for his "kidnapping" and he had beef with B. He couldn't just disappear while making it look like a kidnapping and then reappear days later like nothing happened, could he? So he'd stalked B from the portal in the Shinigami Realm to find where the cockroach was hiding.

He watched what B was doing for days, when he left and when he usually came back only being some of his observations. He'd tried not to pull the trigger too quickly, but he hadn't wanted to keep L waiting too long. And maybe he'd missed the jerk, too, despite their issues. He'd checked on L a few times from the Shinigami Realm, but it wasn't the same. Light had just barely waited until L found B's hideout and started to make a move. Light contented himself with having Ryuk steal some explosives from a facility in the human world and hiding them throughout the abandoned building after B had left the previous day.

He'd been planning to plant some evidence pointing towards B's hideout, but L ended up finding it before that. Light wasn't sure what evidence he'd found since he hadn't been watching L all the time, but he should've known better than to underestimate the man. Light watched closely as the team and L closed in and when it looked like they were going to enact their plan, Light enacted his.

He had Ryuk fly him down to the human world using a scenic route and headed over to the building, clinging to the shadows and the alleyways. Avoiding the other members of the team who were lying in wait, they got in through a back window - not on the second floor but on the fourth - and Light carefully picked his way down two flights of stairs.

As much as he wanted to investigate the sounds of a scuffle starting downstairs, he instead quickly found a convenient room and Ryuk set to work. He made sure Light looked properly kidnapped and then he took the handcuff keys and went to where the action was while Light waited for his time to shine. Ryuk knew what he needed to do. Light had made it clear during the planning stage that Ryuk needed to drop the key in a way that made it seem like it feel out of his pocket.

If they actually put it in his pocket, there would be no guarantee that it would fall out during the scuffle and they needed that to happen or the explosion would be…problematic. So Light told Ryuk to get up close to them - keeping the key in his mouth until the right moment so no one noticed a floating key - and wait. Wait until it would make sense for B to drop something and no one was paying attention, then spit out the key right next to his pocket.

Once Ryuk got back upstairs and let him know L had picked up the key, Light started making noise. What happened next was Light's most dangerous gamble yet, but a perfectly choreographed one. To destroy the piece of the Death Note and to hide any other evidence, the building had to go boom.

And he had to make the danger feel real, even though Ryuk wouldn't detonate the explosives until after they'd gotten out of the building. The type of explosives Light used weren't the most powerful, so they'd be safe enough at a close-ish range. More or less. Still, Light's major priority had been to get him and L as far away from the building as possible and failing that, to take cover from the rocketing debris.

The whole thing had gone flawlessly in the end. So flawlessly, in fact, that it almost made Light paranoid that he'd made a mistake somewhere and hadn't realized it yet.

For B's part, the arrest couldn't be relied upon to hold him for long. L

and Watari knew what they were doing; Light knew that from his own arrest. He just didn't trust B to stay put for very long. He couldn't take the risk that B would find a way to escape from even those two, especially since there was a history there between them that Light felt he was only partially aware of.

What he needed was to get what he info from B and kill him as soon as possible before he managed to do anything. Light couldn't fathom what B would know that would be so important that the King would warn him about killing him, but his mind kept going back to B's eyes. *It has to be something very important to me*, Light told himself. The King clearly knew that killing B would have been the immediate conclusion Light jumped to otherwise. Light felt frustrated thinking about what else he might know that he wasn't telling him.

"Light? Are you alright?" Naomi asked, making Light realize that he'd zoned out a bit there. The woman immediately winced at her words, noticing it might be a bit tactless to say to a kidnapping victim.

Light sighed. "I'm sorry about that. My nerves are frayed, I think." He willed his hand to start shaking only slightly and hung his head, hair falling over his face and covering his eyes. Underneath his bangs, he looked up to watch her reaction.

Naomi's expression had become worried, her eyebrows pulling inward. "We need to get you back to the hotel, where it's safe." She said, putting one hand on his shoulder and the other around his waist, applying a light pressure that suggested rather than demanded that he stand up. Light obliged and allowed her to help him stand.

Proving that they were keeping at least one ear on the conversation by poking in then, Watari said, "We should indeed relocate to a safe location, but I must insist that Mr. Yagami be interviewed as soon as we arrive. It is imperative we hear the story of his kidnapping before too much time has passed."

Naomi's expression quickly switched to being irritated. "Absolutely not! Light's had a trying night; it's been trying for all of us! He's had to go through things that no one should go through, especially not at his age. He was only rescued a few minutes ago, it's no wonder he's shaken up. He just escaped from an exploding building! What he needs now is rest, not an interrogation!"

During her impassioned speech, she'd stationed herself protectively in front of him as a defender. Light felt his lips pulling into a soft smile as a gentle warmth spread through him. She really is one of the best humans.

"I'm afraid I must insist." Watari continued, retaining his stone-cold calm in front of her righteous anger. "We need to get the entire story as soon as possible."

Naomi looked enraged and Light briefly wondered if he should step in and back her up, but then her expression shifted. Light watched with interest as, instead of replying to Watari directly, she pointedly stared straight at L. "He needs rest." She stressed the words, maintaining eye contact with the detective.

L stared back at Naomi steadily in that unblinking way of his. The silence stretched with L not saying anything. Naomi didn't react to the silence, only continuing her staring contest with L, but Light was watching Watari.

Watari seemed to think it was strange or something that L wasn't replying after a while and turned to stare at him, as well. Light was nowhere near skilled enough to even begin to read that man, but it looked like he was expecting something from L. L glanced away from Naomi to look at Watari briefly and then back to Naomi. Then his gaze slid to Light, over her head.

Light found himself in a staring contest with the other man now, too. He'd been checking in on L through the portal in the Shinigami Realm, but he really had hated being apart from the man for so long. Really, he didn't even need the separation as an excuse; he could get trapped in that man's eyes forever. Light almost startled when L's gaze broke away from him suddenly.

The detective didn't look at anyone specific when he spoke, "It will be fine for Light to rest for the night. There will be no material difference if we choose to interview Light today or tomorrow. Let's go back to our headquarters before something else happens." L turned and started making his way to the cars.

Light watched him go, not having it in himself to tear his gaze away to see how Watari and Naomi were reacting. His language was tart and it made it easy to overlook, but L had taken Light and Naomi's side in the argument. He'd defended Light and the knowledge made him break out in what he had no doubt was a dopey grin.

On the way to the hotel, Naomi made several phone calls. The first was to his dad, then to Touta, and surprisingly, to her fiancé. Light wondered why she'd called Raye and proceeded to ask her the moment she was done making her calls. Naomi gave him a strange look when he asked, like she didn't understand why he didn't already know. "Light, Raye was very worried about you. He made me promise to let him know as soon as we found you."

Light blinked in surprise. "I--" *I didn't think we were that close.* "I didn't think he felt that strongly about it. "

"Light." Naomi took his hands and looked him in the eyes. "You're more important than you realize. Don't forget that my fiancé is an FBI agent. Of course he would care about a young man's kidnapping, but even if he wasn't, the fact that it's you makes it worse. Light, you've

done more for us than we can express. It's because of your plan that we were able to rescue Raye when he was kidnapped. When Raye was suffering after his own kidnapping, it was you that pulled him out of it. He wouldn't speak to me about how he felt, but he spoke to you. You were able to talk to him in a way I never could, telling him what he desperately needed to hear. Raye got so much better after that and…"

She hesitated briefly, before visibly steeling herself to make the confession. "Our relationship is better than ever. I…might not have been entirely happy with the way our relationship was before. We've been discussing things more openly; our wants and desires. Your advice about relationships came at a time when I needed it most and I know I can say the same about my fiancé.

"The whole reason I was able to join this team at all and have my ideas be incorporated was because you went out on a limb and chose to believe in me. You, Light, you had no reason to be there for us like you have been and yet you were, at every step of the way. You showed wisdom beyond your years and we're both grateful that you came into our lives. It's only natural that we'd do anything it took to bring you home. That we'd be worried."

Light sat in stunned silence during her speech, as he processed her words. That…

Light had never intended to get close to Raye. His relationship to Naomi had been cultivated for the purpose of establishing his innocence more firmly. He admitted that he liked both of them - they'd grown on him. It was just…

He'd expected his family to be worried, he'd known Touta would be concerned, he'd hoped L would be…but he didn't think about Naomi and Raye. The realization of just how much they thought about him made warmth explode in his chest. Light couldn't not smile at that and it caused his caramel eyes to soften immensely as he looked back at

her.

"Please thank your fiancé for me. Thank you both." He said, softly.

"Oh, Light…" Naomi looked like she could tell how much he was feeling. She went in for another hug, pulling him close and this time, he returned the hug.

He breathed out heavily, exhaling all of the air in his lungs that he technically didn't need and letting his forehead fall onto her shoulder. It's good to be home. It was nearly a full minute before Light brought himself to pull back and Naomi only released him when he did. Light went to lean back in his seat, more relaxed than before, and immediately locked eyes with L, who had actually forgotten was in the back of the car with them and who had been quietly watching the two of them the whole time.

"What?" Light asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

"Nothing. I just noticed how close the two of you are." L said, tonelessly.

Light groaned as he leaned back against the seat, exhaustion causing his eyes to lose focus for a time. He didn't know if L was referring to their physical or emotional closeness but either way, he wasn't in the mood for it right now. "Come on, Hideki. I don't know what you're getting at, but I'm too tired to be discussing anything right now. Can't we talk about whatever we need to talk about later?" Normally, he would've parried back at L about his relationship with Naomi and now Raye, but he'd had a busy morning and he just couldn't be bothered with it at the moment.

"You're right. I apologize." L's response caused Light's eyes to blink

back into focus. "It's not important." Light found himself staring at L like he'd grown a second head. The easy agreement was so unlike L that if he didn't know better, it would've caused him to consider that L and B had switched places.

Maybe the explosion stunt messed him up more than I thought , Light considered. His eyebrows scrunched up in thought. Then, more hopefully, he added, *Or maybe my kidnapping's gotten him to be a little softer on me.* That was a nice thought, one he would investigate later. When he wasn't tired.

When they got back to the hotel, Light had barely gotten out of the elevator before his dad engulfed him in a massive bear hug. It didn't surprise him, but was still a strange feeling. Even now that they were improving their relationship, hugs between the two were rare. Hugs with him felt different.

"Dad?" Light questioned, placing a hand on the man's back. He wanted to ask his dad if he was alright, but wasn't sure if he'd get an honest answer if he asked outright. If it'd been him in the past, the answer to that particular question would've always been a lie.

"I am so glad you're okay. I was so worried about you, Son." His dad whispered, his voice raspy sounding.

Light felt another sharp pang of guilt in his chest and to his utter shock, tears pricked at his eyes. Light furiously tried to recall the last time he'd cried. He couldn't remember. It wasn't just guilt, though. He wasn't crying just because of that.

Wordlessly, Light returned the hug and buried his face in his dad's chest. Once he trusted himself to speak without letting the tears fall, he said, "I'm back, Dad. I'm back." He didn't think it was possible, but his dad's embrace became even tighter at his words.

"Thank God." The older man breathed into his hair.

A small shuffling sound caused them to break up their hug. Right. L, Watari, and Naomi were watching them. This marked the second time within the hour that Light had an emotional moment with someone in front of L.

Light glanced back at his dad. He expected him to make apologies for being emotional while on the job, but very unusual for him, his dad didn't apologize for anything. Instead, the man stared straight at L. They made eye-contact for a moment and then his dad gave him a nod. Breaking eye-contact then, his dad ushered him to the main investigation room, saying that there were others that wanted to see him.

Light glanced back at L as the small group followed after them, but allowed himself to be led. He was sure some kind of agreement or understanding had just passed between L and his dad, but he wasn't privy to whatever it was. It was one of those moments where you could tell words were floating over your head, but you couldn't look up to see them. *Well* , Light glanced up at his dad's name floating above his head. *Metaphorically speaking, anyway* .

"Light!" Touta's voice cried out the moment his dad opened the door to the investigation room and stepped aside. Then Touta was hugging him too and by this point, he knew what to do.

Light easily wrapped his friend up in a hug. He should probably feel more guilty than he did at how much he'd worried everyone, but he had to admit - it was nice to feel cared about. Then Touta shot back, holding his shoulders and whispering furiously to him. "I heard something about an explosion. I was here at the hotel, but your father told me you were caught up in an explosion but that you were alright--"

Light interrupted him before the other man could work himself up even further. "It's okay. Everything's okay, I promise. I'll explain everything later. Right now, I'd like to rest."

"Of course! Of course. Just before you do, there's someone else who'd like to see you first." Touta let him into the room and Light's gaze immediately settled on Near, who wasn't playing on the floor with his toys, for once.

He was standing in front of the door, staring at Light with wide eyes. Maybe it was because Near wasn't saying anything, but Light could read something vulnerable in his eyes. He was clutching the toy Light gave him and wearing his jacket. He softened immensely at the sight.

Light took the initiative this time. He stepped forward and quietly placed his hands on the young child's arms and drew him into a hug. The boy flinched slightly but Light simply held him in a loose hug. Near could break out of it if he struggled enough but it was also firm in a way, right now. Near was still in his arms for what felt like forever before Light felt the slightest tremor in the small body.

And then he was being hugged back by small hands. Light chose not to say anything about it, knowing Near wanted to be treated seriously and like an adult. Light couldn't resist, however, running his fingers through the white hair on his head and saying, "When we have time later, let's catch up with each other, huh, kid?"

Near didn't respond verbally but his nod was more than enough. The boy was so reserved, it seemed like he only spoke up when it was about the case. Seemed like someone was going to have to take an interest in this kid's hobbies.

Poor kid was too young to be dealing with all this. He allowed the boy to cling to him as long as he needed to. Needless to say, it was the longest hug of the day.

~ ⓚ ~

L was in his element. He was sitting in front of his laptop set up alone in a darkened monitor room without the rest of the group breathing down his neck. Light was resting in the room he and L apparently still shared. L hadn't been sure if they'd still be sharing the same room at the hotel, given Light's kidnapping and their argument beforehand.

L hadn't ruminated on it for long, only starting after he'd gotten Light back, but he hadn't really been sure Light would want to share a room with him any longer. Yet, when he laid down to nap after he'd seen everyone, he beelined for the room they'd shared before. Light would find the room just as he'd left it, so L said nothing and simply turned his mind to other matters.

He'd felt the urge to lay down beside Light and catch up on the small amount of sleep he'd needed. He felt certain this time he wouldn't have a nightmare, but however much he might have felt the urge, he didn't think he would be able to sleep at all at the moment. His mind was as active as ever and his body hummed with the manic energy to *do* . He always felt this way when he was about to make a break in a case.

He didn't immediately begin interrogating B, choosing instead to wait a few hours. He decided to take the time to think over carefully how he wanted to go about the interrogation and work on calming himself down. Normally, letting his prisoner wait would serve the additional purpose of putting the person on edge, but B had been trained by Wammy's House, so that wouldn't work on him.

Normally, L would view this as a game where he suffered some losses in their discussion to win at other times. A battle of words with L fishing for information and B playing keep-away with it. This was different and L could still feel the curdling anger in his stomach. Even now that he had Light back safe and sound in his custody, the anger had only eased, not fully left him.

He knew B's general game. The method might be different than last time, but he knew his old successor's goal hadn't changed. B wanted to destroy him. In Los Angeles, that had amounted to him committing a string of murders in order to create a case that L couldn't solve. It would ruin L's reputation as the detective that had never lost a case and, thereby, destroy him. Now, it seemed B had gotten it in his head to destroy him in a different way.

He was targeting Light. And L was no longer having it.

Now, L had decided it was time. He watched B through the cameras set up in his cell. B was being kept in the cell block that L had added to the Kira Investigation HQ he'd had built starting when he first decided to take on the Kira Case. He'd initially wanted to bring Light there when he found him, but it would be the height of folly to bring B to the same building Light was in.

In general, it was best to limit B's interactions with the entire team. As it was, B's only outlet to interfere with the investigation was to get in his team's heads. As such, the less he can speak to anyone besides Watari and L, the better. B was wrapped up in a strait jacket and tied down to a table with belts. Over his mouth was a muzzle and his eyes were covered by a blindfold. He could speak, but he couldn't move or do anything violent.

"B, let's have a little chat." L said into the microphone, telling himself that it was time to stop putting matters off.

B's head shot up as L spoke, even with the blindfold on. "Finally deigning to speak to me?" His voice was slightly muffled by the muzzle. He sounded mostly unbothered by the situation, but L could detect a slight trace of something in his voice that he wanted to pick at.

"I had other matters to attend to." L said.

"Matters like Light?" B asked with what looked like a faint smile on his lips. L's fingers dug into his knees. If this had been happening in the abandoned building, L would have feared B had left Light in a terrible state.

If left alive at all.

Through L's mind flashed the images of B's string of murders in Los Angeles. The bloody, mangled bodies. He'd been able to look at them purely objectively before, but imagining him doing the same thing to Light….

He wondered if that was what B was hinting at. However, L and Light had both gone through a health check with Watari after settling back at the hotel and with the exception of some minor injuries that they sustained during the fight and the explosion, they were both fine.

L forcefully calmed himself. "Yes," He replied, attempting to sound as unaffected as normal. "Like Light. It seems you've gone from multiple murders to multiple kidnappings. Seems like quite the downgrade to me. What happened? Are you running out of ideas?" L needled him.

B's lips twitched down slightly. It was a speedy, miniscule movement that L easily caught. "Well, you know how it is. Variety is the spice of life and all that. Why not shake things up?" B's bound body jerked

sporadically, as if he were attempting to shrug.

"What I want to know is what you hoped to achieve by doing this." L said. "To take such a risk; you must either be very dumb or very ambitious." He waited for a time but B didn't respond. "You've targeted Light in the past. The first time was in the toy store, but I'm convinced that Matt and Mello's kidnapping was also targeting Light specifically, rather than myself. What is it about Light that makes you wish to target him so fervently?"

B was silent for several seconds and then, "Oh, I suppose the same thing that made you target him."

L didn't respond right away. "The suspicion that he has some affiliation to Kira?" That had absolutely not been the first thing that came to L's mind.

B huffed in dark humor. "Well, you're no fun. I was hoping you'd say we both wanted to jump his bones."

L's blood pressure spiked.

B was trying to get a rise out of him. He knew this and yet in spite of it, his heart was picking up pace and he felt the distinct urge to engage in some sort of senseless violence on B's person. This - precisely this - was why L hated emotions. They didn't follow logic. They didn't agree with the obvious. They just plowed through, regardless of anything, and dragged L along behind them.

He didn't say anything as he worked to control himself, but his lack of response was enough for B. "What? What's with the quiet? Did I finally make you speechless? Or…is it Light that makes you speechless?" B sounded like he was having a grand old time.

He needed to maintain control over this interrogation before things went further. "Is that why you kidnapped Light?" If it was, B wouldn't make it to trial. L would make sure of that.

The slight smile dropped from B's lips. "You know…Light is something else."

Warning flags went off in L's head. "What do you mean by that?" He asked, warily.

"He got the jump on me, you know. None of the others could say the same." B went on, almost as if speaking to himself.

"The others?" L pried.

"You know. *The others* ." B said, airily.

Ah, his other victims, L realized. Hearing Light be categorized with them made L nearly boil over again, but he managed to contain it. There was one thing that didn't make sense about B's statement. "What do you mean by 'he got the jump on' you? As I recall, he was in your grasp until I came to rescue him. That doesn't sound very much like he had it handled."

At that, B burst out laughing. It took a while for the laughter to peter out, B finally responding when it did. "You don't get it. The Great L doesn't get it! That's hilarious! Though I suppose I wouldn't have, either, if I didn't know better."

"I have no idea what you are talking about, but it's making me entertain the idea that we gave you too many drugs." L said.

"I don't expect you to understand. I barely understand it, myself. He wasn't there and then he was. How does anyone explain that?" B giggled to himself.

"Excuse me?" L felt more and more lost the longer this went on.

"The key I 'dropped' wasn't mine. I didn't drop it, I have no idea where it came from." B continued, his thoughts seeming disjointed. "I don't know how Light ended up tied up in my hideout. I can't explain any of it." Another unhinged giggle. Was he serious?

"You can't honestly be pleading ignorance?" L asked, incredulously. Did B really think such an absurd claim would work in these circumstances? "Are you truly attempting to say that you have no idea at all how any of this happened?"

"I'm not 'attempting' to say anything. Just thinking to myself, I suppose, about how Light really got me. And how he did it…"

It was the genuine note of wonder in B's voice that caused L to pause before he shook himself out of it. Considering such an idea was absurd. "I hope you're aware that insisting you know nothing in this matter won't help you." L insisted.

"Oh, come on~" B trilled, tilting his head to the side. "I've already committed several acts of murder and two other recent kidnappings. Why should I lie about this? It would just be another feather in my cap, right?" L didn't respond. "Look, if I'd kidnapped Light, I'd love nothing more than to rub it in your face. While I was sitting here, left to my own devices, I considered lying about it to mess with you.

"But I'm starting to really hate you sitting pretty, thinking you saved him from me when you've been played by him as much as I have. I just don't know how he did it…but it makes me even more excited."

"Excited for what?" L asked, but his query garnered no response. B had fallen silent and no further prompting would get him to speak up again. Frustrated, L notified Watari that he was free to do whatever he needed to do to get B to talk and disengaged. L bit his nail harshly. He didn't understand what was going on here, but his instincts were telling him something he couldn't tolerate. Because as ludicrous as B's insistence that he didn't know how Light got into his hideout was, his instincts were somehow finding it believable. None of it made any sense. B's guilt was the most obvious conclusion.

Whatever B said about not knowing how Light got there, the fact of the matter was that Light was found restrained on the second floor of the building B was in. And about that key. The key fell out of B's pocket while they were fighting. It was completely unreasonable for B to try and claim it wasn't his when it had been in his possession. Never mind the glaringly obvious fact that Light went missing right after B clearly targeted him. Was he really supposed to believe B's claims? And yet…

L bit down harder.

Beyond Birthday, what you're saying sounds completely preposterous, but for some reason, a part of me can't help but believe you, even though I don't want to.

And he really didn't, because with this, matters got even more complicated and even more confusing. L went through his memories of the previous events over and over, but he couldn't pinpoint anything new that he'd missed. Despite that, B's words felt believable to him. It didn't make any sense.

L sat there alone in the quiet, thinking and spiraling, but no matter which way he turned it around in his head, there was only one inescapable conclusion he repeatedly came to.

He needed to speak with Light.

~ ❶ ~

Light had known he wouldn't be able to relax after what he'd pulled, even if he was back home now. Still, it took him by surprise that L was there, asking to speak with him as soon as he woke up from his nap.

Light would've probably make a sarcastic comment about it, but L was acting…weird. It wasn't a change that was easy to explain outside of him just being weirdly different. L didn't ask to speak with him like it was a demand, like he normally did. Rather, it was softer, like it was an actual request with a "no" option and everything.

That was what found Light sitting down across from L, trying to figure out what was going through the man's head and whether it had something to do with his Houdini act. Clearly, he failed in trying to determine where this was going to go when the next words L said when he decided to speak caught Light completely by surprise.

"Light Yagami, are you really Kira?" L asked, his voice giving nothing away as he stared dead into Light's eyes.

Light felt something in his chest freeze at the question and the way it was asked. "I thought we were past asking questions like that." He said, without actually meaning it. He was just testing the waters.

"I told you that I believe you are Kira, but I don't believe I've ever asked you directly if you are." That wasn't an answer. L sucked in a breath. "I was raised in an orphanage called Wammy's House after being abandoned by my parents. It's located in England. It is the same place that B, Matt, Mello, and Near come from as well, and…" L gave a long pause, clearly thinking something over while Light watched him in shock. L had never handed over information so easily in his life and Light hadn't even prompted him for it, this time.

"And," L started again. "My name is L Lawliet."

Light made a choked coughing sound that surprised even himself, hand flying up to cover his mouth. There was no way L had just gave him his actual name. There was no way in HELL-!

"I'll ask again." L said. "Light Yagami, are you really Kira?"

It took some time for Light to calm himself down from what he'd just heard, so he couldn't reply immediately. "If I told you I wasn't, what then?" Light asked carefully, after a moment.

L's eyes never wavered from his own. "If you say so now, I will endeavor to believe you with everything that I have."

Light was shocked to hear those words from him. He really hadn't thought he'd ever hear something like that from L and for it to sound like he actually meant it. The two stared at each other for a long time in complete silence. Light considered the situation and L allowed him that. As much as Light knew L, he couldn't tell at that moment whether he was telling the truth or not.

Try as he might, he couldn't tell what L wanted or why he was saying this. L couldn't possibly mean what he said. To do that would mean accepting being wrong if he really let himself believe Light's innocence. If he didn't really believe it and chose to pretend to accept it anyway…he'd be admitting defeat. If he wasn't just doing it to get Light to let his guard down, then that is exactly what it would be.

Light thought about the L who locked him up in a cell to prove a point after refusing to do so earlier on Light's terms and then lied to him about the results. That L had to be convinced to let him go and only by making Light think that his father was going to kill him.

He recalled the L that went into almost clinical depression because he wanted Light to be Kira and he couldn't prove it. He thought about L hyper-focusing on him then and now as his only real suspect until his death. None of the logic that he so prized would convince him that Light wasn't Kira because he knew and he'd always known. Light couldn't believe that L would concede to Light, admit defeat or to being wrong in any capacity.

So Light opened his mouth, ready to give some platitude or other that gave nothing away - some confession that wasn't a confession that would taunt the man just enough - but then he stopped.

No, he froze. Because as he refocused on L, Light suddenly felt what this situation was actually meant to be. There was a look in L's eyes, steady and probing. He was looking at Light so intently and his hands were gripping his knees like they were a lifeline. Like he was stressed. This wasn't a game to him right now.

L was trying to level with him. For once, he was putting it all out there. The man full of secrets who always kept his cards pressed close to his chest was trying to give ground and he was giving Light the chance to reciprocate by doing the same…or to take advantage of the weakness. Light couldn't say why he felt that to be the case, it was just the understanding that passed between them as he gave L his full

attention.

And with the strong feeling that that was what L was doing, Light's gut curdled at the thought of coming out with his usual lies about his innocence. It was hard to describe, even to himself, but coming out with his usual spiel now, at this exact moment, felt like it would have been the biggest mistake of his life.

But if L was just pulling another one of his tricks…if he had one of those recording devices he put everywhere and he was just getting Light to confess on tape…

Light was a fool.

Then and now, there was one battle L would always win against him. L would always take Light's heart and Light would always be lost because of it. In the past, Light had prioritized winning over that love, shoving it down and doing what needed to be done to secure victory. He'd promised himself he'd be different this time. He'd mourned to himself that he couldn't have the honest relationship with L that he wanted. What if this was his chance at it now?

If he gave up his chance at it now, even if it could potentially be a trick, he would be proving that he hadn't changed. If this was all a farce by L to win, then let him win. Light was no longer desperate to conquer the world to achieve some end goal, L was his goal. He'd have to put up with some teasing from the others when he got to the Shinigami Realm for getting killed by a human, most definitely. Maybe he'd think better of it later on, but in that particularly emotional moment, Light felt that he could give up for L.

Light sucked in a breath, straightened his back, and drilled his golden eyes into L's pitch black ones. "Hey, L…" Light made sure to use L's real name, willing the other man to take his answer seriously. "I *am*

Kira."

A long second of silence stretched between them, L's eyes going comically wide, as if he truly hadn't expected that answer. He probably hadn't. Light felt a brief flush of pleasure at having flouted L's expectations, once again, but he remained uneasy about what reaction L would have. He waited on pins and needles for L to say *something* .

"Was that a confession?" L asked, looking about as disbelieving of what he'd heard as Light himself had a few moments ago.

"It was…" Light responded hesitantly, but he remained firmly committed to this.

"And you killed that man during Matt and Mello's kidnapping?" L asked, eventually. His tone was indescribable, but it had none of the calculated interest that L usually had when he was investigating something.

"I executed the threat, if that's what you mean." Light gave a faint, sardonic smile. Then the smile dropped. "Not that I suppose you care."

"You're talking about the boys now?" L surmised.

Light fidgeted in agitation. "Don't think I forgot what you said before that. Your justifications for what happened at the orphanage with B and the kids and your hand in it."

L fell quiet for a few beats. "Would an apology fix it?"

To someone else, the question might have sounded condescending, but Light knew L really didn't know how to fix the situation.

"Would the apology be genuine?" Light countered with his own. L's answer would determine Light's own, but he suspected the answer he'd get already.

L paused. "Not, perhaps, in regards to my actions. I cannot honestly say that I regret those. However, I can completely honestly say that I regret that my words hurt you."

The first part of his statement was just as Light had anticipated, but the second part brought some warmth back to him, if only a little. "I want you to regret what you did to those boys." Light stated, not unkindly.

The silence between them was heavy before L responded. "I could say I was sorry, but that would be yet another lie. Whether you believe what I've done is right or wrong, I believe my motivations justify it."

Light had felt like that might be the case, but he still deflated a little at hearing it. "It's not like I haven't been in that place myself before, but I don't think the goal you're working towards is worth it. Certainly not worth hurting children. I'm upset that you did it, but I'm even more upset that you feel nothing about doing it."

"Kira has killed people." L pointed out.

"But they weren't *children* ." Light insisted, truly upset.

L paused to look at him like he was once again realizing just how

troubled Light was over this. "I can't pretend to feel things where I don't." L said, slowly. It was a statement but the way it was said made it feel like an apology. "I don't feel anything about it. I could claim to, but you'd know it to be false, wouldn't you?" Light didn't need to answer that; L knew his answer. "Do you consider me to be a monster?"

That got Light to look at L in shock. That wasn't the kind of question he'd expected from L. L, who always spoke about himself like a pinnacle of justice to others, despite obviously not actually caring about it. L, who called Light evil on their first interaction together. He was asking if Light saw him as a monster. He hadn't expected it of him.

"No." Light found himself forming the words. They landed with a thunk between them.

"Why not?" L pressed him.

"I could never. I just couldn't. To me, you'll always be an asshole, but never a monster." Light said. "I love you too much for that."

L's shoulders tensed. "I don't understand how you can say that, despite believing in your mission so strongly. After getting so upset with my methods of teaching my successors, how can you turn around and say such things. Is love really so strong?"

"Love is the strongest thing out there." Light said with a vague smile. "I know, I know. I sound like an escapee from a romance novel." L couldn't say he'd ever read one of those, but he supposed that wasn't the point. "But it's true. I didn't used to think love mattered all that much. But now? I realized that love is a tenacious little bitch. It'll slam into you like a semi-truck and then dig its claws into you, whether you like it or not. It refuses to die and it keeps you awake at night

until you can't take it anymore."

Light gave L a sad smile. "Falling in love tore me apart…but choosing to show that love put me back together again."

"Surely you can live without love." L said, pressing him harder. His finger was tapping rapidly on his knee; the only sign of his agitation.

Light didn't know what L wanted to hear, but it was clear that he was trying to get something specific out of this. He might be trying to get Light to fall out of love with him the way he'd tried before. "You really can't. It's an agonizing existence." Light said, with utter certainty.

“And if the person you love is unworthy?”

"Do you think you're unworthy of my love, L?" Light asked, his voice having an airy quality to it. "Or…is it that I'm the one you think is unworthy of you and you can't stop loving me, regardless? Are you asking all these questions to get to know yourself better?"

"That's not the case." L said, quickly.

"Which isn't the case? The first? The second? Both?" Light peered at L, who was silent under the onslaught of questions. "Maybe you're just panicking." He sighed.

"I don't panic." L said.

"Like hell you don't." Light scoffed. “And them being unworthy doesn’t

change if you love them or not.”

"So you just do nothing if the person you have feelings for proves unworthy of your love? Can you truly still love someone that doesn't deserve it?" L asked.

" *Of course.* You can decide to not show love to them if they treat you badly, but it's not like you just wake up one morning and stop loving someone for a reason like that." Light responded, easily.

"Why not?" L kept going. "Why can't people simply choose to stop loving someone who doesn't deserve them?"

“Because love isn't about ‘deserve’!” Light burst out, growing frustrated with the line of questioning. “Love is something that happens with or without your permission. It's something that happens to you on its own and it can't be turned on or off like a light switch when times get hard. You can still control how you act, but you can't pick and choose who you fall in love with. Sometimes a person can be the most deserving of love in the world and not find it and other times we can love someone who doesn't deserve that love at all.”

Light took a breath to calm himself before continuing. “Because of that, sometimes love can be inconvenient. It can happen between people who are enemies or it can happen at a bad time. Maybe you fall in love after you're already married or maybe you love someone who doesn't love you back. ‘Love makes fools of us all’, have you heard the saying?”

Of course L had.

“Maybe the greatest struggle in the world is how you process and deal with that love. Love can make people crazy, they can do amazing and

horrible things because of it. And sometimes…" Light briefly drew off but quickly picked back up again. "And sometimes people deny their feelings. Tell themselves it isn't real because they can't stand to face it. They're cowards who can't accept that they're human with human desires and flaws. A lot of people view love as a weakness and not everyone can admit to having those." Light's voice got quieter and quieter as he went on, until he was speaking in just above a whisper.

L couldn't quite decipher the complicated expression Light had on his face. From what L had seen of Light's love, it was an exuberant and bright thing. Light's version of love was soft and warm and unlike anything L had experienced before.

He wasn't sure where this very personal looking pain was coming from. It seemed as if the boy had decided from the very moment they'd met that he was in love with him. Light had never once shied away from showing L his feelings very clearly, so what could he possibly know about people who shove their feelings down when he is quite obviously the opposite of that?

L wondered if maybe Light was alluding to L himself while he was talking about it. Did his insights into L's inner thoughts really go so deep? L couldn't deny that many of Light's words struck true. He himself was someone who couldn't accept weakness, who couldn't - as Light put it - accept that he was human. In the end, it wasn't Light who saw L as a monster, but L who saw himself as one. A monster incapable of feeling, who spoke of justice without caring and who witnessed love but couldn't understand it.

"And how does it normally turn out for those people who cannot admit their desires?" He asked.

Light took a few seconds to respond, collecting himself. "Very badly. Normally, those people end up losing everything before they realize the value of it all."

Is that what you think will happen to me? L contemplated. *Is that sincere concern from you or a promise that you won't stay forever if I can't admit to you that I…*

"What would you recommend I do, then?" L shot back. "If I found myself in love with someone inconvenient?"

"Ah, there it is! Only you would confess your love to me while simultaneously calling me inconvenient." Light scoffed, then he shrugged his shoulders. "I can't tell you what to do. You have to decide for yourself. Heck, in the past, I would've made all the worst decisions if I fell in love."

L's interest piqued. "Such as?"

Light shrugged again. "Probably go into insane denial about my feelings and keep going on with my plans while shoving those feelings down into the deepest crevice I can find. Sound familiar?" Light gave L a sly smile. L didn't dignify that with a response.

"But," Light sighed, closing his eyes. "I'd eventually realize that pushing that person away isn't making me happy and choose to embrace it, instead, for fear of losing something irreplaceable." When Light opened his eyes again, he was greeted with L looking off into the distance contemplatively. *Well, at least he's thinking about what I said, this time,* Light thought.

"I suppose, given your earlier words, you don't advise trying to ignore it?" L inquired.

"Could you ignore a hole in your chest?" Light countered. L has

nothing to say to that. Light sighed. "You're asking all the wrong questions. It isn't if you can live without something. How do you *want* to live, L?"

L's finger stopped tapping. "How I…want to live?" He sounded like the idea meant nothing to him.

"Yes. How you want to live. Your desires for your future. Is there a goal you're working towards for your future? Something you want to accomplish?" Light finally stopped peppering L with questions, but the detective said nothing in response.

The two of them fell into silence. In another life, where Light feared capture and saw L as an enemy, he may have spent the silence spiraling into an internal panic, wondering what the other man was thinking. Wondering what it meant for him. Now, he settled easily into the silence. In fact, it was bordering a comfortable one as the two just sat together, not saying a word.

It took a little over ten minutes before L said something. "Do you have a goal?"

So L was choosing not to answer any of Light's previous questions. Light couldn't find it in himself to be irritated and call him on it, though. He heavily suspected that L wasn't answering him on his questions about goals because he couldn't answer them and didn't want to say so. He thought so especially because the question was redundant or close to it.

Many people accepted the idea that Kira was trying to wipe out crime or some variation of that. What they all agreed on was that Kira did have a goal and it and it was related to cutting down on crime. Kira didn't look like the kind of person who didn't have goals and plans, so asking him if he had them was pointless.

Light would give him a short reprieve, though. "Of course, I do. I want to help people." His major goal was to repair and strengthen the relationships he'd cast aside the first time around. Secondary to that, he wanted to help people with his power to kill.

Of course, deep down, he understood that human lives were so transient as to be practically worthless. To just about every other Shinigami, there would be no "practically" about it. Maybe it was because Light could remember being human once. Perhaps it was because he'd fallen in love with one.

He couldn't discount the other connections he'd made along the way, either, like with his family. They weren't enough to get him to see the light in Life One, but he supposed they could've carried over. No, they did carry over. He recalled watching Near sadly through the portal in the Shinigami Realm, without knowing why. He remembered killing a proportionally larger number of humans who committed crimes in his second life.

Regardless of the reason, he couldn't wholly give humanity up as not worth his time. As a Shinigami, his time was endless, anyway. Seeing how aimless the others generally were, they could stand to care a little more. Maybe there was no purpose in giving victims justice for crimes that would only repeat in the future. After all, the humans would die anyway in the blink of an eye.

And yet…well, Light got some satisfaction out of it, despite knowing that. And it wasn't like Light had any care about how many people he killed as long as they actually deserved it. He already had quite the body count, anyway. Not that he had bothered to count.

"That doesn't quite seem like a goal." L said.

Light huffed. "It's not like goals need to be highly structured things all the time.

"They can be a more casual thing. What do you want to get out of your life? To accomplish?"

L hadn't thought about life like that. Accomplishments for him had been less about making goals and more about escaping the tedium of existence. A way to escape the tedium. Light didn't let the silence linger for very long before taking pity on him.

Light held out a hand to L and gave him a smile. "If you don't know, we can find out together. I can help you find a goal for your life." The smile on Light's face dimmed slightly and he pulled back his hand a little. "Or…I mean…we *can* do it together, can't we?" Something so vulnerable flooded Light's eyes that it made it hard for L to breathe. Perhaps for the first time, L didn't need to speculate on what was going on in Light's head. For the first time, Light admitted to being Kira, with no way to plausibly argue that wasn't what he was doing. Light was undoubtedly wondering if they had a future now.

If L were to claim that he was confident in his next steps going forward, it would be one of the biggest lies he'd ever told. Still, he reached his own hand forward and snatched Light's back quickly before it could fully retract. His action caused Light to flinch in surprise and L internally chastised himself for the mistake. Much more calmly, L said, "I accept your suggestion."

That wasn't the right thing to say, L was pretty sure of that, but when Light's expression lit up, he realized that they must have been good enough. And then Light jumped forward and wrapped him up in a hug. L froze and then slowly lifted his hands, returning the hug.

Light exhaled, rustling L's hair. "You realize we still have a lot to talk

about, right? And I want to know about the orphanage." Light said in a whisper.

"Yes." L said, tightening his hold. "I know. There are more things I want to know, too."

Chapter End Notes

I think the last section is the first time I've had two character's POVs together. Symbolism all over that

Day Out

Chapter Summary

Even days out have their problems.

Chapter Notes

This chapter...ended up a lot longer than I initially thought it would. I really thought it was shorter.

Try not to get used to this length.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What happened now?

That question was flashing through his groggy mind at least once per minute. It had been doing that ever since the previous day when he'd admitted what he was to L. Light had been on pins and needles for the rest of the night and now it was the next morning. L must have left the room sometime last night, leaving Light to wake up with a headache like he had a hangover and stare at the ceiling of the empty room. L probably left to investigate something about B, since he had nothing left to investigate about Kira anymore.

He'd done either the best or the worst thing ever yesterday and he was oscillating between the two. Light, not wanting to leave the hotel after opening up to L, asked his dad if he could stay there and his dad, not wanting to leave Light just yet, decided to spend the night, too. Light felt bad for how clearly stressed his stunt had made his dad, though that was when he learned that his mother and sister didn't know he'd gone missing. His dad confessed to hoping he would be able to find Light before his dad had to tell them. Light could understand why he wanted to do that.

Light…actually hadn't spent much time with other people the day before. Light's head pounded as he tried to force the fuzz from his mind as he recalled the previous day's events. *Apparently,* Light

thought. *Yesterday was a bit harder on me than I thought.* Well, being that close to an explosion would rattle anyone's brain. Adrenaline and the high from a plan gone well had probably been the things that kept him going, but now it was crashing on top of him.

Aside from the explosion, he'd still had a wild day. Setting up for the explosion, staging his grand return, the emotional toll of reuniting with everyone and then admitting the truth to L…no wonder he felt like he had a headache. Thinking too hard hurt at the moment, but he managed to piece together the rest of his day yesterday. L had stayed with him for a while after they'd opened up, but they hadn't spoken further about either of their pasts, despite both having so many questions.

L, we're such a mess together, honestly… Light huffed.

They still had so much they needed to talk about and Light still wasn't convinced that L wouldn't turn him in. After all, this was everything he'd wanted, wasn't it? To catch Kira? Then again, with the insistent questions he'd asked about relationships the previous afternoon, maybe catching him was all L wanted in the same way that winning against L was all Light had wanted before. Light hoped that the fact that he hadn't been forced to spend the night in a cell meant that L wasn't going to do anything crazy. Hell knew with L, but still…

Light wondered why L had given him his name. His actual, real name. *have things really changed so much? The old L would've never done that, even if he thought it would get an admission of guilt from me.*

Light wouldn't lie to himself that he completely understood what was going on in L's head right now, but as he thought back to their discussion of love and what it revealed about L's mental state, he thought he understood enough.

Light buried his face in his pillow, trying to drown out the pain, and remembered how his first ever kiss with L felt and then the sensation of hugging him. He felt a smile tug at his lips. It had ups and downs, sure, but…love really was something wonderful, wasn't it?

~ ❶ ~

Love was the most deplorable emotion on the planet. It was horrendous. It was ghastly.

L had finally, *finally* gotten what he'd needed to win their battle after so many months - longer than he'd worked a case in ages - and he was doing *nothing* with it. L had never failed to press any advantage before. He'd never shown any weakness. This was terrible and the worst part was that L almost didn't even care. Because right at that moment, Light was sleeping in the same room L had slept in. He wasn't sure why that was important to him, but for some reason, the knowledge pleased him. Not a small amount, either.

L didn't fully understand himself anymore. It was as if he'd changed without his notice and now he was being confronted with the ramifications of it. And yet, as frustrating as he found his sudden lack of desire to bring Kira to justice was, it was drowned out by the warmth that shot through him at how soft Light felt against him.

The previous day, the rest of the investigative team had tentatively agreed to take the next day - today - off. They'd all agreed they needed the physical and emotional rest after everything that had happened, and L wanted to be free of them for a while. The police chief was still in the building, but he was one of the least troublesome members of the group, behind Ms. Misora. L had requested both Watari and Near make themselves scarce that day, which left L almost alone in the hotel with Light. Which actually meant he was left to his own thoughts since, last he checked, Light was still sleeping. L itched to see if Light was awake yet, but he couldn't bring himself to risk waking the man up.

There's an irony here, L thought, not for the first time. *I only attained what I wanted once I no longer wanted it.* This seemed the route his thoughts wanted to take this morning, because he had done something horrific…he'd fallen in love.

Fallen in love with a golden-eyed boy with a cunning mind and the intellect to challenge L in a way no one else ever had. He could slice through the criminal population with brutal efficiency and some kind of Esper power and then turn around, being so soft, holding L's cold hands and telling him he loved him. Now that he'd admitted his… *feelings* …to himself, he could think of little else. Perhaps it was best that Light was still sleeping.

Now that he'd retrieved Light and no longer needed to focus on catching B, he could afford to spend this time alone, thinking matters through.

He really hated to admit his loss and having it repeatedly yet inevitably thrown in his face by the public and likely by every major governing body in the world, as well. L had never bothered himself with what others thought of him, but having the constant reminder of his singular failure might drive him half-mad on a personal level. However…

However, with the memories of how unbelievably low he felt when he didn't have Light with him still achingly fresh in his mind, he knew he would endure the mockery. Such a thing - frustrating as it would be - was nothing he couldn't handle. What truly mattered to him was that he knew the truth. L couldn't deny the flush of pleasure he felt at having confirmation of what he'd always known, deep down.

He was *right* . He'd always been right. No matter how many twists the case had taken, it wasn't his own instincts that had deceived him. At the end of the day, L had always sought to prove his conclusions to

himself before all others and, it seemed, it would stop at that stage, this time.

It wasn't as if he had been attempting to catch Kira for moral reasons, after all. Light had been right about him all along, just as L had been right about him. He couldn't care less about the criminals who died and was only marginally concerned with the collapse of society that Kira possibly represented. Without the burning desire to right a moral wrong as he saw it, another path opened up.

L would guide the case away from Light before allowing it to crash and burn on its own. Light's kidnapping would provide an excellent springboard for it.

L could use the kidnapping as proof that Light was innocent, though he knew those two things had no bearing on each other. The majority of the team had the chronic inability to think critically. It might not take much effort on his part to twist the event to support Light. What ostensibly happened afterwards were the difficult parts.

Would it be a better option to let the case fizzle out with no more leads?

Or, he considered after a moment. *Perhaps I should frame another person as Kira and allow them to take Light's place on the chopping block.*

And where did he and Light go from here? Assuming Light didn't wake up and retroactively kill L in a panic as he recalled his fateful confession, what did they do going forward? What *were* they? Objectively, one could argue they had been dating for some time now, given the handful of both official and unofficial dates they had gone on together. With that kiss, they should most definitely be dating. What all did dating entail?

L had never bothered himself with the minutiae of romantic relationships before - it had never been relevant to him - and this reminded him of why that was. Trying to nail down one's relationships with others was much more unpleasant than solving cases, which was based on facts and logic. Understanding relationships felt like trying to quantify the unquantifiable. It was a loathsome endeavor.

If they *were* dating, what then? Once a case was over, L would normally leave to start his next case. Would Light expect him to stay? Light couldn't go with him if L left; he had his schooling and his future to think about.

How did two people who were supposed to be mortal enemies carve out a place in each other's lives?

So much was left unknown between them, as well.

If it wasn't B who kidnapped Light - as L suspected - then who did? A third party? This mysterious past partner that L knew little about? Or had Light managed to stage his kidnapping with assistance from unknown individuals? Regardless of who was behind it, now that Light had openly admitted his identity, would he tell L what had truly happened?

Would he trust L with the answers L craved to the questions he'd had since the beginning of the case regarding the scope of Light's powers and how they worked? In both cases, the only person who knew the answers to it all was Light.

L couldn't help but wonder…if he were in Light's shoes, would he trust himself with such potentially explosive information? His

instinctual reaction was to say no, but Light had already trusted him with a confession. An unusually quiet part of himself wanted to call Light naïve for that, the same way he'd called Kira honorable all those months ago. Neither were a compliment, but instead L looking down. Yet, if there was one thing L knew about Light, it was that he wasn't naïve. No, his ideals might seem that way at first, but there was more to see with him.

Perhaps it was just that L knew his own limits or lack thereof. In any other situation, he would have absolutely taken advantage of a suspect's feelings for him, using it to pry a confession from them. And then, he would've played the long con, pulling more and more information from an emotionally compromised person in the guise of someone trustworthy. If Light were anyone else, that is how it surely would have gone. Then again, had Light been anyone else, he wouldn't have fallen for L the way he did. No one else had ever loved him like that, even his parents. L felt that damnable warmth creep through him at the thought.

It seemed he was going to have to talk to Light if he wanted clues on what was going on, even inside his own head. He couldn't say he liked the feeling of needing to rely on someone else.

~ ❶ ~

Light had just managed to convince himself to leave the bed when L ghosted in through the door.

The odd thing that immediately pinged off Light's radar was that L was carrying a tray with a mug on it.

"L?" Light questioned, his eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

"Light." L greeted. After a pause, "You've been making pained expressions."

It wasn't a question and Light huffed out a laugh at the L-like delivery. "Have !?"

"Yes." L set the tray onto the table beside his bed, then picked up the mug and held it out to him.

Light carefully pushed himself up so that he was sitting up in the bed, his back resting against the pillows, and cautiously took the mug from L, trying not to drop it. He breathed in the scent. "Ginger tea?" He asked, looking at L.

The man nodded. "It's good for pain relief and nausea." Light felt his heart swell at the sweet gesture and took a deep swig from it. "You know, I almost feel insulted that you didn't even consider that I could be poisoning you." L muttered.

Light swallowed the liquid and gave his detective a smile. "Sweetest poison I've ever had, if that's the case."

Was it wishful thinking that the expression on L's face just then was his brain shorting out? "How'd you know that I was in pain, anyway?" Light asked, casually.

"…I checked the camera footage from this room."

"Ah." Light nodded. "That makes sense."

For a time, the two sat in silence together. Unlike their usual, it wasn't stressed with unspoken questions about what the other person was planning. Light was comfortable and relaxed as he slipped on his tea. Eventually, though, his curiosity rather than his awkwardness forced him to break the silence. "Tell me what Wammy's House is." Light said.

He said it with an airy, moderate tone but it wasn't a request, it was their unspoken agreement, wasn't it? They would both try their best to level with each other from now on. Light had been honest about his present, so now it was L's turn to be honest about his past. This was L's chance to show Light whether this was going to work or not. At least he wasn't poisoning him.

"First, there is something I wish to know." L returned and while it wasn't what he'd hoped to hear, it wasn't a no.

"Hm, what is it?" Light asked.

"During Mello's kidnapping, you killed a man without knowing his name." Factually incorrect, but Light decided to not point that out just yet. "What I wish to know is…is that a relatively new ability of yours or one you've always possessed?"

To Light's ears, it sounded like L already had his theories about that. Well, the man was already showing restraint by not outright asking how Light had this supernatural ability to kill. "It's not a new ability." Light told him easily. It was nothing compared to outright admitting he was Kira, even if it did feel weird.

L nodded, his face giving nothing away except that he expected the response. "You didn't kill the moment you met me because you love me." It wasn't a question, but Light nodded. "Why didn't you kill Near or Mello? Why not Kill Watari?"

Light huffed. "What do you take me for, some murderous lunatic?"

"They're trying to catch you." L pointed out.

"They're *children* ." Light stressed.

"Watari isn't."

"I hold no ill will towards people just trying to catch me. Watari wasn't a criminal to me and so I didn't target him." Light said, then shot L a look. "I've answered my part, so now tell me yours. I don't like what I'm not hearing about this orphanage."

After a short pause, L shuffled closer and Light moved to give him space to sit on the bed. "The orphanage, Wammy's House, is where I and the other investigators you've met were raised." He didn't say anything immediately after that. Light knew that much, but he didn't pressure L to get to the meat of things faster than he was comfortable with. L was a tough nut to crack and he was *trying*.

Ever so slowly, L continued. "My mother and father abandoned me in a park when I was a young child. I don't know if it was premeditated or an impulsive decision, but I know they were disappointed with me as their son." Light paid rapt attention to L as he spoke, feeling a cold dread make its home in his chest as L spoke of being abandoned by his parents as a kid. Coming from a loving family unit, Light couldn't imagine how painful it must've been for him. It made it even worse that L was speaking in a detached tone. Like, he'd grown numb to it long ago, if he'd ever even let himself feel the pain, at all.

"I remember being very cold. It was Winter at the time. That was

when Watari found me, though his name was--"

"Quillsh Wammy." Light inserted calmly, recalling easily the name that lived on top of Watari's head.

The room dropped into an uncomfortable silence. Three seconds ticked by. L continued.

"Yes, Quillsh Wammy found me and took me to an orphanage for gifted children he owned and ran. Wammy's House." He glanced at Light and then away again. "I was raised there for many years. I spent much of my time in my room on the computer he bought me. I grew bored easily and eventually, I turned to amateur crime solving. I would solve cases remotely and then hack into the database of whichever government agency was instigating it and leave clues for them. Eventually, they started leaving messages on their databases for me, asking for advice on this case or that case…"

So that was how his career had started, Light watched L who was watching the wall.

"Quillsh came with me when I began to travel for different cases. He left the everyday running of the orphanage to someone else and chose to support me with everything I needed. After a few years, we decided that I needed a successor. My job is a dangerous one, after all, even with all of the precautions I take. Ideally, I should have multiple successors, in case something happened to one of them."

Light didn't like the way L was talking about that. Like children dying because they'd been made his successors was a part of some equation. "How old were you when you two decided you needed a successor?"

"I'd just recently turned thirteen." Light felt a sour taste in his mouth.

"So we turned to the orphanage. As it was already a place for intelligent children, we turned our attention there for a successor."

"Training." Light said, recalling his conversation with B.

L gave a slight nod. "I admit I was never overly involved with the training or the orphanage after I left. I got updates on how things were going and on rare occasions I held remote meetings with the children there. B was a few years younger than me and joined the orphanage a year after I left. He was part of the first group to be trained as my successor and he showed great promise, alongside another child, A. They were my first and second successors, respectively. That was when…an unfortunate event occurred."

Light swallowed.

"The training to be my successor was rigorous and it appears it was rough for many of the children. B and A were the most talented among their group, but it seems A struggled with the training more than we realized. The child proved to be brilliant but unstable."

Light felt a flash of anger. "What happened to A, L?"

"They took their own life."

"You're telling me…" Light sucked in a breath. "…that the environment at the orphanage was so bad that it drove a child to suicide?"

"I assure you it wasn't the normal reaction to our training." L said, instead.

"So you're trying to say A died because they were mentally unstable? That's not going to fly, L. It's victim-blaming."

"I'm doing no such thing--" L tried to say, but Light cut him off.

"You are. You're trying to insinuate that A was abnormal or unstable because your training caused them to snap. You're saying that rather than it being your fault for hurting them, it's their fault for being 'weak' enough to be hurt. *That* is victim-blaming." L didn't respond. Perhaps because he had nothing to say to that.

"What happened with A messed B up, if he wasn't already." Light said. It was a statement of fact. "For all you know, your 'training' could have very well pushed B off the edge, too, if A hadn't snapped before he did.

"I suppose so." L said, sounding vaguely tired as he did so. "It wasn't the intent to push them so far."

"No, the intent was to turn them into tools!" Light argued. "Most people can't go days without sleep, eat mainly junk food, or work on cases basically non stop. Even for people that *can* do that, it doesn't make it healthy. I don't even need to know what the training actually was. Just knowing how unhealthy the desired result was, I can see exactly why they were driven to the brink."

Light sucked in a breath. "I'm starting to see now why you were making comments about being replaceable, but don't you see how foolish that is, L? Don't you see the folly of it?"

"What do you mean?" L finally turned to look at him.

"The training was *always* going to fail, even if not so spectacularly. *You* didn't have specialized training to become the person you are, so no amount of training would recreate *you* . You're trying to artificially create something that happened naturally. There's another reason you *haven't* created another L. It's because I've always been right about you being special and irreplaceable. There can never be another person like you. Go ahead and make all the artificial plans you want."

This was one of the few times that L's surprise was palpable, glistening in his dark eyes. "I…" L drew off, his voice having a breathy quality to it.

"I wish you would just *wake up and see the truth* , L. There can never be another you. There will *never* be another you. Because of that, your attempts to recreate something special will *always* fail." When Light finished his rant, he was greeted by silence not unlike a black hole. Light allowed the silence to settle. He had nothing else to say.

Still, L said nothing. As the silence stretched on and L said nothing, he considered the man before him. His dark eyes and the way his hair fell over his face. How this person could ever think he was replaceable was beyond him. His mind went back to the kiss they'd shared the previous day. He'd planned all of it more-or-less, but he was still a little surprised L let him kiss him. L had pushed him away so much he almost expected to get shoved away again. But he wasn't. No, he was actually pulled *closer* . He still remembered L's grip on his shoulder.

He'd modelled his little plan after a scene he saw in one of those dramas he'd accidentally gotten hooked on. There was one scene where a girl was kidnapped by a love rival and tied up in a building that was set for demolition - which was completely metal on the rival's part, by the way. Luckily, her love saved her. It really looked like they were going to kiss in the scene, too, but they frustratingly didn't. Well, Light fixed that.

"You truly believe that trying to create a successor for myself is completely worthless? That our efforts up until now have been wasted?" L asked, suddenly.

"I really do." Light nodded. A second later, he squinted at the detective. "You're feeling the urge to ask if I'm trying to shift you away from having a successor for Kira-related reasons, aren't you?"

L hesitated before answering. "I didn't say it aloud." The "this time" was left unsaid, but Light heard it, all the same.

"That's right, you didn't." Light said with a warm smile. That alone showed he'd learned from the last time. Plus, the way he said it made it sound less like he was actually considering it and more like it was just a thought that'd entered his mind. Light wasn't angry about that. Who would L be if he wasn't suspicious of everything he heard?

"So what would you suggest now? That I give up on having a successor?" L asked.

"How about just picking your successor based on who stands out on their own, without the need for training? If someone needs training that you didn't have in order to succeed you, they might not be the right person for it, anyway." He reasoned.

L hummed, silently taking in Light's suggestion. "Your headache seems to be better." He said eventually.

"Oh." Light blinked, taking in his words. "You're right. I got so distracted that I didn't notice. Thanks, L."

"For what?" L asked, looking surprised at being thanked.

"For distracting me and for the tea. I think it really helped." Light started to leverage himself out of bed.

"You don't need to be in a rush to get up." L said. "The other investigators agreed to take the day off today. They've all gone home to spend time with their families with the exception of your father. He didn't want to leave you so soon. He did, however, agree to use today to catch up on his sleep."

Light was somewhat surprised to hear so. "Everyone agreed to take today off? And you *let them?* "

L shifted. "We have B in custody and are working on interrogating him, which the team is not needed for. A properly done interrogation is not something that can be brute-forced and sped through, at any rate."

Light chose not to comment on the interrogation. He remembered how L had interrogated Misa.

"So you're saying most everyone is with their families and we have the day off, isn't that right?" He asked, his mind already coming up with an idea.

As if he could sense it, L stiffened. "Yes…"

Light smiled, a little toothily. "We should take the boys out for the day."

~ Ⓚ ~

L sincerely had no idea how he had gotten here. Currently, he was standing in a movie theater with Light beside him and three boys - Near, Matt, and Mello - crowded around them. L felt crushingly awkward in this situation. Upon Light's suggestion, they asked Light's father to drop them off and pick them up later.

The reactions of his successors were rather mixed. Mello looked nearly as awkward as L felt. Near said nothing and wasn't looking around, but clung to Light's hand. The white haired boy's other hand clung to his dinosaur toy. Matt was the only one who looked happy with the situation, bouncing up and down and looking around excitedly.

"Which movie do you boys want to watch?" Light asked, leaning down towards them. Mello and Near didn't answer, but Matt did.

"This is so cool! I haven't been to a movie theater since I was a kid! Can we see this one?" Matt bounced over to one of the featured posters on the wall, pointing at one for a movie adaptation of a video game.

"Hm." Light hummed as he trailed after the boy, taking Near with him. "That does look interesting." L was sure that was a lie. He had never seen Light touch a video game in his life. "Near. Mello. What do you two think of seeing this one?"

Near shrugged, still clinging to Light's hand. "It looks fine." He said, quietly.

Instead of answering Light, Mello turned to L with an incredulous

expression. L didn't dignify the look with a response, glancing off to the side.

"Mello, man, c'mon! Please? You owe me!" Matt said, rounding on Mello. Mello looked openly horrified, but Matt continued to stare at him. Near opened his mouth to say something, but Light put his other hand on the boy's head and shook his own subtly. Near followed the unspoken order and closed his mouth.

"Uh…I-Wha--?" Mello looked around in panicked confusion, his gaze not lingering on any one person for more than a second and continually going back to Matt, who was still staring at him with puppy-dog eyes. No one spoke up to intervene and it wasn't more than a few seconds later that Mello cracked. "Ugh! Fine! I'll watch the stupid movie!" Mello's agreement was almost drowned out by Matt's exaggerated cheer.

L felt a certain amount of satisfaction from seeing Mello be just as discomfited by the situation as L was, especially with his other two successors appearing perfectly content with the situation.

"Well, now that that's settled, let's get some food and our tickets. L's paying!" Light gave his own cheer and shepherded the three children to the ticket booth.

"When did I agree to that?" L asked dryly, following behind the group reluctantly.

Light shot him a look over his shoulder. "Funny. You can shell out the money to live out of high-quality hotels and buy out whole floors, but you can't buy some movie tickets and candy for your kids? Interesting. I'd like to hear the explanation for that."

L heard the warning in Light's tone as if it had been announced through a bullhorn. And what defense could he give anyway when Light put it like that? It wasn't as if L actually had any care for the money he spent, anyway. He ignored Light's decision to refer to L's successors as his kids with absolute determination. L dutifully paid for the tickets and followed the group to the snack area.

"Pick out whatever you like, kids! As much as you want, since it's a special occasion." Light was saying with a big smile on his face.

"Really?!" Matt burst out, bouncing up and down in his childish excitement. "We can really get as much as we want?" Light chuckled and actually reached out to ruffle his third successor's hair.

"You sure can. Just don't get used to eating so unhealthily, okay?" Light replied.

Matt nodded eagerly and shot over to the colorful displays, dragging Mello with him.

Near made no move to separate from Light and after a few moments, Light looked down at him. "Don't you want to try something?" Near hesitated before nodding slightly. Light smiled warmly at him and tugged his hand gently. "Well, come on, then. Let's go take a look. I'll help you pick something out." The resulting smile from Near looked relieved.

L watched the two walk away as something occurred to him. He hadn't spent a great deal of time with his successors before now, but looking back on it now, he was certain that Near has been acting progressively more childish since coming here. Light, he realized, was ruining his successors - dismantling their training - and the worst part was that it clearly wasn't some scheme. Trying to fool L at this juncture would be useless and L had been watching L interact with his

successors. Even L could see how affectionate he was with Near and his indulgent attitude towards Matt and Mello.

L knew Light liked kids, so it wasn't that surprising that he was behaving that way. He was just surprised that Light had strong-armed him into dragging his successors out to the movies. He hadn't seen that one coming. Light only justified himself with "it isn't good for those kids to be focused on the investigation all the time", but L got what he meant. He didn't like how L's successors had been raised at the orphanage or that they were involved in the investigation, at all.

When he'd found out they had a free day, Light had immediately demanded they go out to a convenience store. L wasn't sure what Light bought, but he went in and came out quickly enough. Then they went back to the hotel to grab the boys and go to a movie theater. At least Light didn't insist they go to a large and popular one…

Suddenly, his phone rang. Fishing it out of his pocket, he recognized the number, one of many this person used. "Hello?"

"Ryuzaki, where are you?" Watari's voice came from the phone.

"Out." L said, simply.

"Out where?" Watari asked.

"We'll be back in a few hours." L said instead of answering.

"Light, Near, Mello, and Matt are gone, as well. Are they with you?" Watari asked, sounding tense.

"They're with us. We--"

"L, come over and pick out some treats." Light called over to him.

L blinked. "Me as well?"

Light rolled his eyes. "Of course. You're part of this, too."

"Yes, coming." L hung up the phone and walked over from where he had been standing apart, watching the group. While L had been lost in his thoughts, his successors had each acquired their own snacks. Near was cradling a small popcorn, Matt was loaded down with various sweets and a soda, and even the reluctant Mello had acquired five chocolate bars in the time that L wasn't paying attention.

L came to a stop beside Light as his eyes meticulously combed through the available food offerings. L couldn't say he'd ever been to a movie theater before either, but he could immediately tell that it wasn't anything special. Maybe it was because this theater was on the small size, but everything there could be bought at a convenience store like the one they'd just been to. L was used to far better desserts, anyway. Light was looking at him expectantly. L grabbed one of the candy bars.

"Is that all you're getting?" Light asked.

"Yes." L said without explanation. In his experience, people got irritated when he gave monosyllabic answers to things, but Light just hummed in apparent acceptance and herded them all to the cash register. When they went to find their room, Light slid to the back of the group, ushering the kids and then L inside before himself. L found

it odd because Light had been almost constantly at the head of the group up until that point.

At least, L found it odd until he saw the seating area and the large amount of kids sitting in there. The theater was only half full and L already found himself with the urge to retreat from all of the noise the squealing children were making. That was quickly stopped when he backed into Light, who was standing in front of the door. Like he had anticipated L's reaction.

"I know. It's a lot." Light commiserated as he placed his hands on L's shoulders and firmly urged him forward. L briefly wondered who besides Light would have the nerve to casually put their hands on him while knowing that L could break their arm in an instant. Then again, Light could kill him in the same instant. "The kids need this experience, though, so we must put up with it. The kids will quiet down for the most part when the movie starts up. Of course, the movie will be even louder. If all the noise is a bit much, I got some earplugs for you. That should take the edge off." Was that why Light insisted they stop by a store before they came here?

The two caught up to the boys who had found their seats around the middle. Near was sitting in the row behind Matt and Mello. L didn't know who sat where first, but the many reports from Wammy's about how his two main successors just couldn't seem to get along came to mind just then. L allowed him to lead him to Near's row, Light sitting down in the seat beside Near and tugging L down in the seat on Light's other side. Near immediately clutched onto Light's hand and Light smiled at him, ruffling the boy's hair.

The screen was still dark, so the movie was nowhere near starting. L felt a flash of annoyance as another young child cried out about something. How had he been talked into this?

"Hey." Light leaned over to him. "Are you good? Do you need earplugs yet?"

L felt a spike of warmth in his stomach at Light's attentiveness. "No. I'm fine." L found himself saying.

Light gave a brief smile before leaning down to root through his shopping bag with the one hand that wasn't being held by a kid. L watched him curiously until Light gave a sigh of triumph and pulled out a plastic carton. Light promptly held the carton out to him and peering at it in the dim Light, L saw it was a slice of vanilla roll cake with fruit and cream in the middle. A plastic fork was in the container, as well.

He…was not expecting that. He reached out and took the cake from him. He looked at the cake for a moment, before glancing at Light in question.

Light held a finger in front of his lips like he was about to tell L a secret, his golden eyes dancing with a familiar mischievous gleam. "Sneaking better food into the theater is also part of the experience."

A huff of laughter left him at that, nearly startling himself. Light flashed him a smile as he leaned back into his own space, but barely a second passed before Light was poking at L's hand and holding out his own. L slid his cold hand into Light's warm one, holding the cake Light got for him in his other hand. As the commercials started, L found himself staring down at the cake in his hands with a foolish smile, concentrating on the comforting warmth radiating from his hand.

And then the obnoxiously loud music started blaring from the speakers.

"Light." L said tonelessly, raising his voice so he could be heard over

the noise.

"Yes, L?"

"Earplugs, please."

~ ❶ ~

Watari hung up the phone, staring at it quietly for a handful of seconds before pocketing it.

This situation has long since spiraled out of control. L had gone out with his successors and Light. He'd refused to tell him what they were out doing, but he'd heard Light's voice in the background talking about picking up snacks. This situation had been problematic from the beginning. L was his greatest achievement and Watari had been watching as Light Yagami slowly unraveled him.

Watari had tried to get L to see reason, to course correct before he crashed and burned, and here L was casually going out for snacks with him. Without telling Watari about it, no less. Watari usually drove him everywhere.

The elderly man was completely expressionless as he turned his attention back to the monitors. He would spend more time going over the footage he had before he returned to the as-yet unused investigation HQ L had commissioned. It was about time he interrogated B further on what he knew, but of all the things that have been bothering him today, one stuck out and it was difficult to ignore.

Twice now the cameras for L and Light's shared room had been disabled, once yesterday and once this morning. The camera had been shut off and Watari had been locked out during that time. The only one with an authorization higher than him that could do that was L.

Had L gone to see Light both of those times? And if he had, why was he hiding what happened during those meetings?

The fact that the footage was missing was as suspicious as anything and L knew that, so why? Had L been swayed by Light and now they were colluding? Was L protecting himself by interfering with the cameras or was he protecting Light? Watari would have to leave to see B soon, but the prevalent thought in his mind was that he couldn't let it happen.

L was his greatest creation. He wouldn't let it end like this. All the effort, the time, the money. He wouldn't accept a half-baked product.

~ ❶ ~

Mello genuinely didn't know what was going on.

He was sitting in a movie theater with L, Kira, Near, and Matt. They were at the tail end of a boring video game movie that Matt was, of course, loving. He kept gasping and yelling and clutching onto Mello's arm in excitement and it was the only thing keeping him from jumping up from his seat and demanding to know what was going on here.

They were supposed to be *hunting* Kira, not watching movies with him! And what is with this…this holding hands thing?!

At first, it was just Near being weird, like usual. He was being weird, clinging to Kira's hand like a baby. Mello had looked to L, expecting him to lay down the law. For him to tell Near that he shouldn't behave that way towards their main suspect. Except…he didn't. L just… looked the other way. He was just letting it happen and Mello couldn't fathom why.

So he just let himself be pushed and pulled around by Matt, all the while thinking about how he just didn't understand…right up until the first time he'd glanced back in the theater and saw L holding hands with Kira, too.

In that exact second, Mell felt his whole world crumble to dust.

The horrifying realization that there was something *going on* between L and Kira. Mello wasn't a child. He knew adults only held hands when they were seeing each other. When they were dating.

That new piece of information gave a terrifying explanation for why they were all here, doing whatever Kira said, and why L wasn't saying anything against him. But no! That couldn't be right!! L would never do something like that with a criminal and especially not the suspect in the case he was working on! L was the pinnacle of a detective! The thing they all aspired to be. If he was getting close to a suspect - romantically or otherwise - it would definitely be for the sake of the case!

And then he looked back again and saw L's smile. He had barely ever seen L before, but seeing L smiling like that…

Mello didn't have as much experience solving cases as he'd want, but his instincts were screaming at him that this wasn't an act to catch Kira. And if this wasn't an act of manipulation, then that meant this was *real* . That L *really* had something going on with Kira and what

did that mean for the case? Was L…was L going to finish this case? Mello…Mello could solve the case! He would--

Mello remembered Kira catching him every single time he snuck into his territory, even when he shouldn't have been in the area. Like he'd known where Mello was and what he was doing from far away and given how Kira seemed to just *know* that Lind L. Tailor was a criminal. Mello felt a chill go down his spine. Was Kira really omnipotent, like some people were saying? Really…a god? Combined with how the snake had charmed L, suddenly it felt that Kira was truly unstoppable.

At least, if Mello wanted to stop Kira, he couldn't do it alone. But…

He looked back once again and saw the same thing he'd been seeing all day; Near clinging to Kira's hand like a toddler with their mother.

…he couldn't ask Near, even if he wanted to.

~ ❶ ~

After the movie, Mello played up how tired he was, hoping they'd take him directly back to the hotel if he did. After they were kidnapped by B, L started having him and Matt stay at the same hotel as him instead of being remote. Normally, Mello would rather die than act childishly like that; he wanted to impress L. But now he doesn't have the mental strength to deal with it. This day and its realizations were already almost too much for him. He couldn't even be happy that it worked and they went straight back to the hotel.

Matt talked the entire way back to the hotel, chattering all about the movie and the snacks and the experience. What made it worse was that Kira was chattering back, the two of them talking like friends.

Mello listened to it absently, staring out the car window, watching buildings and people as they passed but seeing nothing. Once they got back to the hotel, he made his way back to his and Matt's shared room on autopilot.

It was only after he and Matt were in their room and the door closed behind him that Matt turned to him in concern. "Hey, Mello. Are you okay, man? You didn't say a thing the entire way here."

"I'm just…not feeling well." Mello said, tonelessly.

Matt looked at him worriedly. "Is this about back when B--"

Mello cut him off before he could continue. "No. It's not."

Matt looked confused for a few seconds and then his expression soured as something occurred to him. "Is this about Kira? Come on, Mello, when are you going to let it go? Kira's a nice guy."

Mello was 1000% not in the mood to hear that right now. "Yeah. Sure. He's a nice guy. The same way a hornet is tiny and harmless." Mello muttered, just loud enough to be heard.

"The guy's never done anything to you." Matt pointed out, irritated. "And really, we snuck into his room and went through his stuff. He would've been plenty justified in being angry about it or even calling the police. He didn't need to be so nice to us."

Mello didn't say anything to that. Didn't know what he *could* say to it. So he just stared at the carpeted floor, not saying anything.

"Mello?" Matt's voice sounded concerned again and Mello felt a hand being placed on his shoulder. "Hey. Maybe you should talk to L about taking a break from the ca--"

Mello knew exactly what Matt was going to say and he absolutely couldn't stand to hear it. He ripped himself away from his friend and stumbled his way to the door.

"Mello?! Wait!" Matt called out, rushing to follow him.

"Leave me alone! I'm going to see L." Mello spat out. That was a lie, though. He wasn't going to see L. What would be the point when L had been completely taken in? He wasn't sure what he was aiming for here, either; he just wanted something to hold onto. Instead of going to L, Mello went to Near's room. He never would've seen it coming, him going to Near, but what choice did he have?

L was compromised and Matt had been completely taken-in by Kira. It seemed like Near had, too, but Mello couldn't accept that just yet. The crushing loneliness was already creeping in on him and he desperately fought back the feeling that he was alone, even when surrounded by people. As much as he'd always hated it, he had to admit that Near was smarter than him. Despite Near being younger than him, he had never won against him in anything. Forever second place.

If Mello caught onto Kira, Near had probably done so earlier and while Matt had clearly swallowed the lie of his innocence, he couldn't believe that Near had.

Mello hadn't been sure if Near would be in his room or if he was still clinging to Kira's side like a limpet, but there he was when Mello opened the door to his room. He was playing with his toys, like usual.

"Near."

"Yes? Is there something you wanted?" The younger boy didn't look at him as he responded. He did that a lot. Mello always hated it.

"What game are you playing with Kira?" He demanded, cutting to the chase.

"With Kira?" Near questioned.

"You know who I'm talking about. The police chief's son. Don't think I didn't notice that you aren't really even investigating him. You know he's Kira, don't you? You *know* ."

Silence descended on the room. Near said nothing at first, he just kept playing with the toys and not looking at him. Mello listened tensely to the plastic clacking but for once, he let the silence go without attempting to break it. The wait was agonizing. "I'm simply bored of the case. It isn't interesting." Near *finally* said, his voice so close to a whisper that Mello had to strain to hear him.

Isn't interesting..? If Mello felt numb before, it was nothing compared to now. He felt tingly and there was a ringing in his ears so loud that it nearly drowned out his own voice as he spoke again. "That's not true. That's a lie." His eyes were stinging, but he ignored it. "That person is Kira. Don't you *care?* Don't you…" Want to prove yourself? Close the case? Become the new L?

Near let the silence linger again, heavy like a stone that sat between them. Then, "No, I don't." Those quiet words nearly shattered him to bits.

Mello stumbled backwards towards the door, suddenly feeling the need to run away again. He felt so much like an island in a raging sea. Just as he was about to get to the door, Near spoke again. "He saved you, you know. You and Matt. Maybe he's owed some thanks."

Mello was out the door in an instant, tearing off down the hallway with those words chasing him. He didn't even know where he was running to. Where did he think he was going? He got his answer when he found himself standing in front of Kira's hotel room. Mello lingered in front of the door as the minutes ticked by.

He shouldn't go in. He shouldn't…

Mello pushed open the door without knocking. It was only when he saw Kira reclining on one of the beds that Mello remembered that L and Kira were still sharing a room. L could've been there. Kira *was* there. Mello didn't know what *he* was doing there. His thoughts felt disjointed.

Kira had sat up when the door slid shut behind him. "Mello? What are you doing here? If you're looking for L, he's--"

Mello didn't hear what he said after that. His heart had started beating heavily. "How--How did you do it?"

"How did I do…what?" It was the perfect look of confusion on Kira's face that caused the numbness to snap and all the emotion he should've been feeling came flooding back in a tidal wave.

"How did you *do it? Beat* L and Near and me? Everyone! Everyone is on your side! No one believes me about you! You kill hundreds of people and there's hardly anything to prove it!" Mello bent forward, hands on his knees, screaming at the floor instead of looking at Kira.

"There's no such thing as a perfect crime! There's no such thing as a perfect crime! There's no such thing!! So why? *Why?* Why is there *nothing?* Why are you the perfect killer? The perfect manipulator. Nothing I do works! Nothing I…so what am I supposed to do now? What am I…" His voice trailed off, slowly becoming quieter and quieter until he just suddenly stopped speaking. He was breathing shallowly, his heart in his throat. What did he do..?

"You broke into my house with your friend to prove my guilt, even though your closest friend thought you were wrong." This statement brought Mello's gaze up from the floor to the person sitting on the bed. Kira was staring at him, a complicated look on his face.

Mello couldn't detect the tone or the look in his eyes and it made his hackles raise. That, and the words he said, which felt like mockery. "Matt would see the truth once I proved it!"

"And when no one listened to the conclusion you'd drawn, you snuck into my hotel room." Kira stated once again.

Why did he have to insist on reminding Mello of his failures? "If people won't listen to me, I'll make them listen to me." Mello gritted out.

"Isn't it exhausting?" Kira asked.

It *was* . It was so exhausting that Mello didn't even have the energy to scream about it. He was so *tired* of fighting and not just in this one case. It was just the one that was breaking him. "Whatever it takes." That was Mello's answer. The only answer.

Kira surprised him by standing up from his bed. Mello staggered back a few steps but froze as Kira approached him. Had he finally pushed Kira too far? Had he finally realized that Mello wasn't going to give up and decided to get rid of him? Was he finally putting an end to the "nice guy" routine?

This would be the time for Mello to finally reign in his temper and backtrack, but instead… "No matter what you say or do, I'm not letting you win! I will--I will show everyone that I--" His next words caught in his throat as Kira enveloped him in a hug. He practically choked on them as strong arms pressed him firmly into the older boy's chest. Mello's body locked up, his brain screeching to a halt in the face of what was happening to him.

"You're very determined. You never gave up." Kira said in a quiet voice.

This was dangerous. In an instant, Mello burst into movement, trying to jerk out of his grip and bringing his hands up to push at Kira's chest, but the guy just wouldn't let him go. If anything, his grip tightened.

"It's okay." Kira said just as quietly as before, not a hint of strain in his voice. "You've been so brave. So tough. But it's okay to rest now. You've earned it. You've done enough." Kira placed his hand on the back of Mello's head, pressing his face more firmly into his chest.

This is dangerous! Something in Mello's mind screamed out at him as the boy felt a wave of emotion surge up inside him at those words. He brought his hands up to push at Kira again, but they were shaking and he doubted the strength he used was enough to even push over a chair. Kira, predictably, didn't move. He just hugged Mello tighter.

Mello wasn't aware of his legs losing strength until they went out from

beneath him and Mello slid to the ground. Kira followed him down, still holding him in that tight hug. "It's okay now…it's okay…" He was saying.

Mello opened his mouth to say that he was fine and a sob came out. His face flushed with embarrassment, but he couldn't cover his face in this position. He was just like Near, he realized. He was such a baby. In the next instant, Mello went practically limp as he sunk into the older boy's arms.

And Mello, to his horror, buried his face in Light's shoulder and cried.

~ ❻ ~

Beyond spent most of the day - or was it night? - alone.

He knew well that it was a tactic to psychologically break down suspects. It was one of the many things he'd been taught in that horrible orphanage. Knowing what they were doing helped, but he was starting to get agitated the longer he spent in the quiet cell. At some point, he'd started intentionally breathing heavier, just so he could have something to listen to while he waited, but eventually he had to stop. So he just waited. Waited for L and Wammy to decide he'd suffered enough. He could barely twitch, both because of the bondage setup and because of the exhaustion leftover from Wammy's last little visit.

In his abundant free time, he turned it around in his head. What was "it", you ask? Light. Light was it. Light aroused a strange mixture of emotions in him. There was anger, but also intrigue and awe. A large part of him was angry, but the other parts were…

The framing for kidnapping, the key, the explosion; Beyond was sure

that Light was behind it all. He had never been so sure of anything in his life. It didn't make sense, there should be no way it was possible, but he had never been more sure of anything in his life. The facts as he knew them were the following:

Light was Kira and he had the same ability to see people's death dates that Beyond possessed. At some unknown point in the last week, Light went missing or something. L shows up at his hideout clear - how did he find it? - under the belief that Beyond was behind it. During their fight, a key he didn't recognize fell out of…somewhere…and at the same time, Light appears tied up on the floor above them. His hideout was also apparently rigged with explosives that he knew nothing about.

Beyond *knew* Light was behind it all, he just didn't know *how* . No one else would kidnap Light just to frame Beyond and if someone else *had* kidnapped him, it was suspicious that Light hadn't set the record straight yet. No, Light was his own kidnapper. Then again, maybe it was a fool's errand trying to figure out how. It was abundantly clear now that Light had more special abilities than he had initially been credited with. After all, the events could've only unfolded the way they did if Light had some heretofore unknown abilities he was using.

Beyond would've entertained the idea that Light had a sidekick or something, but given that no one was near their fight when the key fell, there was clearly something else going on here. If Light had the supernatural ability to kill people remotely, why couldn't he have other abilities?

He could be sure of nothing here, but he can make some educated guesses. Light could have tied himself up. It would've been relatively easy to do; all he had to do was gag himself, handcuff his hands in front of him, scrunch his legs up, and shimmy his arms under his legs and behind his back. Beyond had done that kind of thing before.

The explosives, too, didn't need another person. If someone could've infiltrated his hideout while he was out and put explosives everywhere, it could've easily just been Light that'd done it. What really posed serious questions were the sudden appearance of both Light and the key. However Light got there, it sure as shit wasn't by the first floor entrances. Light *was not* in that building before L arrived and there was only one stairway. The key seemingly just *appeared* in the same way as Light did, but even more blatantly.

Teleportation, was that it? It would explain the key and Light's appearance. He could still have someone working with him, but the old theory had always been that Kira worked alone. He would like to ask Light himself, but he would have to wait for that. Light would come to him, he was sure of that. They have a connection, they were like each other. They had the same eyes. Light might be packing more heat than he was, but that fact remained the same. Especially after going through all the effort to frame him, he would want to talk to him.

Beyond heard Wammy enter the room. The door was probably opened quietly, but to his ears that had become way too accustomed to the stark silence, it sounded booming. "Heyyyyy, Wammy. Finally got tired of waiting for me to crack?" He asked with pep in his voice.

Wammy didn't respond to Beyond's questions. He never did, the power-tripping old man. Beyond continued to pepper him with comments, but Wammy just fiddled silently with some materials.

"Oh, come on!" Beyond said, starting to get just the tiniest bit annoyed. "You can't actually be this bad a conversation partner. I know we haven't seen each other in a while--"

"Do you want to kill Light Yagami?" Watari asked suddenly, causing Beyond to fall silent. He kind of wanted the blindfold off just so he could see the elderly man's expression, because his tone of voice offered nothing even though he was asking…

Beyond felt a toothy grin cross his face. Why lie? "I would love nothing more." L could feel the same heartbreak and devastation Beyond had felt when he lost A.

Before Light Yagami, such an idea was ridiculous. He thought L was a machine of a man, who felt nothing for anything, tormenting Beyond for most of his whole life. Light was the first thing he'd seen L get angry about. First it was in his hideout and then again when Beyond needled L about him being attracted to Light. It was easy enough for him to do and very fun to watch the usually icy L blow his top. Light certainly had his own attractions, but by far his most appealing trait was how important he was to L. Beyond would love to kill Light.

Wammy took such a long time to respond that Beyond began to wonder why he even bothered asking. He listened to some rattling that he eventually placed as a cart. *Guess it's time for another round,* Beyond was not particularly surprised to note. What he *was* surprised about, however, was that as Wammy moved into his space to get started, the old man leaned close to his ear to whisper something.

"I'll be expecting you to follow through on that."

And despite the situation, Beyond found himself wearing a sharp smile.

Chapter End Notes

Misa next chapter~

Winds of Change

Chapter Summary

There is hardly a single character in here at this point that isn't scheming something.

Chapter Notes

This is the first time in a long time that I've had a birthday upload (my birthday's this weekend).

8 AM the next morning found Light and L heading back to the main investigation room from their shared one. That was pretty late in the morning for L, considering he could go days without taking a passable break from investigating. When they entered the room, his dad and Near were the only ones already there.

Workaholics, Light thought fondly.

His dad was sitting in the middle of one of the two couches in the room, which would put him near the center of the group when everyone else arrived. Near was sat on the ground with a small collection of the toys Light gave him. When his dad saw him, he stood up and opened his arms for a hug. Light eagerly met him in one, breathing in his smell; something he was becoming familiar with. Once they broke apart, he ruffled Near's hair affectionately before taking his usual seat with L beside him.

It was only *seconds* after L logged onto his laptop that L received a call on his cell. L fumbled in getting his phone out of his pocket before answering. "Hello? Ah, yes, Watari. Morning. What is it?" L paused to listen. "No, I started late this morning. Hm? No. Uh, huh. Of course. What was your suggestion?"

Light watches as whatever Watari said on the other side of the call caused his shoulders to tense. "No, I don't think a move would be

necessary." L responded, causing Light's antennae to go up. Light quickly reached over to tap L's shoulder and when the other man's eyes flicked to him, he gestured for him to mute the phone.

"What, Light?" L asked, after he'd muted his end of the call.

"What are you two talking about? What move?" Light asked, eagerly.

"Watari was suggesting we move the physical location of the investigation to a building I had constructed specifically for this investigation. It is the same place we've been keeping B imprisoned while we interrogate him." L explained thoroughly, either for his benefit or for the other two in the room.

Either way, Light was excited! This was what he'd been hoping for before everything went south and it was especially important now that B had poked his nose where he wasn't wanted. It had only been a few days since he'd been back and he was already getting nervous about it. He *needed* to talk to Beyond ASAP so he could figure out what on Earth was going on with him that he needed to know about so he could just kill him already! To do that and do it quickly, the best option was to move into the new HQ. and honestly, he hated moving hotels.

"We should do it." Light proclaimed and L blinked, peering at him. "It would be higher-security and…" Light leaned in to whisper the next words to him. "…I want to talk to B. Please."

The look in L's dark eyes was piercing. "You're planning something." He whispered back, even quieter. Light gave the smallest of nods, barely moving his head. L drew back and said in his normal voice, "Are you sure you'd feel safer there? I don't like the idea of you being near B."

"I wasn't around B when he kidnapped me." Light said. "And knowing you, he's under a lot of security there. It'll be fine." He assured his boyfriend. L hesitated and Light could see L thinking it over before his finger flicked over and pressed the unmute button.

"Make the preparations to make the move as soon as possible." L told Watari. L listened for a bit. "That's acceptable. Thank you, Watari." L said, hanging up.

"Something you need to tell us, Ryuzaki?" His dad asked when the man was off the phone.

"Yes." L muttered, still giving Light curious glances. "But it should wait until the rest of the team is here. I don't want to repeat myself.

The different members of the group milled in at different times, keeping the instructions that L had given them early on in the case to stagger their arrivals. Light took the opportunity to scope out everyone who came in, individually, gauging how they reacted when they saw him. If necessary, he'd make conversation just to see where they stood with things.

His dad and Near were already there when he and L arrived, Light having successfully convinced L to stay in their room together longer than he ordinarily would. Near seemed fine after Light checked in on him, much to the older boy's relief. His dad just seemed tired. Light personally thought he was still recovering from the mental and emotional strain his fake kidnapping must've put him through. Naomi and Touta were a comforting mix of concern about him taking more of a break after his ordeal and being happy to see him doing well after everything.

Mogi was as difficult to read as ever, but Aizawa really wasn't. The look in his eyes and the stilted way he talked to Light told him that the man was either unhappy that he still seemed to be part of the investigation or just didn't fully believe in his innocence. Ide was similar, albeit more subtle about it than Aizawa was. Still, there was a suspicion in his gaze, a slight hesitance in interacting with him, that betrayed caution.

Just as he'd expected. While his kidnapping had convinced some of the group of his overall innocence and made others more reluctant to voice opposition, not everyone was convinced. And why should they be? Beyond Birthday had proven just before he staged his kidnapping that Kira was either in their group or his, forcing Light to kill on demand like he did. His kidnapping stunt didn't make that suddenly not happen and it couldn't possibly work on everyone.

Now that everyone was there, Light started mentally placing people into categories based on how much of a threat they posed to him and therefore, to his and L's future together. This thing between him and L - this mutual honesty - was still fresh and new; barely more than a day old. There was so much left unsaid that they needed to talk about and Light didn't know what exactly the near future was going to look like now? What was L going to do about the investigation, moving forward? What was *Light* going to do about it?

It was with supreme calm earned from two additional lifetimes, that Light pushed himself forward methodically. Light had never had any intention of losing this game, but now he really couldn't lose. If L was on his side now, then Light's next greatest problem was the other investigators. He needed to weed out the ones that were suspicious of him in any capacity, because they were the ones who would propel the case forward if they were allowed to. He had no interest in allowing it.

Maybe it was because he was focused on those thoughts that he didn't immediately clock it when the conversation changed. The following words were the ones that told him he should've been listening.

"She's still not here yet. I'm not surprised she isn't taking this seriously but it still irritates me." Aizawa grumped.

Light's ears metaphorically twitched. *There's someone else that isn't here?* Light surmised. *Who?*

"I mean, it was thanks to the information she gave that we were able to find Light before anything happened." Touta defended.

She? Light felt like he'd just been doused by cold water. He fought not to get carried away and forced himself to ask, "What? Who?" It better not be *her* . Anything but--

"Oh, right." Aizawa said, turning to Light. "You weren't here when L discovered she was involved in the kidnapping. The one with the kids, not yours." He amended.

"Who ?" Light demanded, feeling like he was fraying a little bit, his stress ratcheting up.

"You know her." Touta said, starting to look at him in confused worry. "She's--" Just then, Touta was cut off by the door swinging open.

"Hi, everyone!" Misa greeted, bouncing into the room. "Isn't this morning *great* ?"

L was unsure about what was going on here, but he was very concerned by it. He'd never seen a person pale as quickly as he'd just seen Light do just then. He'd first looked up from his work when he'd heard Light's panicked voice demand to know who was involved in his successor's kidnapping. The situation hardly warranted that response. Barely two seconds passed before Misa entered the room and Light's face drained of practically all its color. L opened his mouth, not entirely sure what he was going to say, but he never got the chance. Light hurdled himself into the adjoining bathroom and the door was slammed shut. L heard the lock engage.

"What was that?" Amane asked the room, all wide eyes and confusion.

"That…was Light." Aizawa said, clearly displaying the surprise everyone in the room felt.

L was floored. His mind was trying to comprehend the incredibly strange behavior he just witnessed, but his instincts…his instincts honed from years of solving cases spoke up, telling him Light was scared. Scared of…Misa Amane? The conclusion was baffling, especially because this was possibly the first time he'd seen Light be scared of someone.

He'd hardly ever seen Light afraid of anything, actually.

"Huh. What a weirdo." Amane huffed, casting a look at the bathroom door. Then she brightened up like a switch had been flipped and she practically threw herself at L. The detective wasn't able to get out of his chair fast enough and she clung to his arm, beaming up at him like he hung the moon. A shiver ran up L's spine. "What are you working on today? It's been *days* since you invited me over."

That's because I didn't want you to get in the way of rescuing Light with

your presence, L thought with annoyance. Upon realizing that Misa had played a role, albeit a *small* one, in B's plan to bait Light, L was obliged to allow her closer so she wouldn't do anything else that would mess with his plans.

Misa Amane was annoying, that was all he could say about her at the moment. She wasn't annoying in the same way that Matsuda was annoying, but rather in the annoyingly persistent way. It felt gratingly like a kind of failure, allowing Amane to come visit him routinely. He wouldn't be allowing it if Amane didn't persistently reassert herself into his attention every time he focused on something else, usually making his job more difficult in the process.

L's mind inevitably went back to Light, who still resided in the bathroom. Not a single sound had escaped from the room and L felt a small tinge of worry. Frustratingly, Matsuda seemed to be of the same mind, because Matsuda leveraged himself up from his seat just as L was about to pry Amane off of his arm and do the same.

Hesitantly, Matsuda knocked on the door. "Light? You okay?" He called through the wood. He paused to allow Light to speak, but Light said nothing. At least, nothing they could hear from outside. Matsuda tried the handle, but it was still locked. "If you don't want to come out, could you at least unlock the door, so I can come in?" The ensuing silence was splitting and lasted for nearly ten seconds. L was counting. Then they heard a slight *snick* .

L's eyes bore into the man as he pulled the bathroom door open just enough to slide through before pulling the door closed behind him. They all heard the door being locked again. For a moment, everyone stared at the door and no one said a word. Then Amane's unwelcome voice broke through the silence. "Are you okay? You look angry about something."

It took L a second to realize she was talking to him and another second before he realized that his left hand was holding onto the arm

of his chair so hard that his fingers were aching. He quickly let go, but didn't dignify her question with a response. L was becoming quite anxious about it by the time the door unlocked and opened again. The detective was disappointed when he saw Matsuda emerge alone.

"Uh…right. So." The buffoon cleared his throat nervously. "Light said he'll come out, but he needs something first."

"And what is it that he says he needs?" L asked after a moment.

"Um…a mask." Matsuda shifted from foot-to-foot.

"Pardon me?" L asked. Did he hear that properly?

"Light says he won't feel comfortable without it." Matsuda said. A weighty pause. "He's feeling shy."

What an audacious lie. What tripe! As if Light had ever felt shy about anything in his life.

"Oh, come on!" Aizawa exclaimed, scowling. "This is just childish! Tell him to come out and stop this."

"Light is prepared to stay in there all day." Matsuda said.

L tuned out the seething Aizawa to think it over. It was a nonsensical request. It made no sense and all of this behavior was incredibly unlike Light. It was obvious that something more was going on here, so the question was if he would indulge him despite not knowing what

was going on.

…Hardly even a question, really.

"I'll have Watari go to pick up a mask." L said, dismissively. It was almost as if everyone in the room turned to look at him in unison. He hardly thought that was warranted.

"You're agreeing with this?" Aizawa demanded, sounding incredulous. L had already turned back to his laptop, shooting the necessary message to Watari, immediately getting an affirmative response back.

"Hey! Are you listening to me?" Aizawa demanded again.

"I'm listening. I'm just not responding." L said, not looking at him. He was fairly certain the sound he heard Aizawa let out afterward was a growl.

The next 22 minutes were awkward, even for L. This was the first time Misa had joined them as a group and with Light hiding out in the bathroom, getting the group to focus was proving difficult. Getting Amane to focus on its own was a task. She was incredibly childish, talking loudly and getting easily distracted. The entire time he was waiting for Watari to return and managing the group, he was formulating his next steps in his mind.

The last two days had been something of a whirlwind for him. He'd gotten confirmation that Light was Kira and essentially agreed to work with him. It wasn't as if he hadn't already started making plans for it in that time. He had. However, this was still the singular most impulsive thing he'd ever done. Rather than making a plan first and then executing it, he'd gone ahead and done something and now he

was coming up with plans to enable it.

That didn't mean he was going to allow the plan to remain ill-conceived. People like Aizawa and Ide had become more suspicious of Light, following the kidnapping of his successors that B was responsible for. Good thing B could fix the problems he himself caused by acting as a scapegoat for Kira. And L couldn't decide if moving the whole group to the same building as B would be a net positive for this goal or not.

L nearly leapt up when Watari entered the hotel room with the required mask, eager to wrench the model from the arm that she had been clinging to almost the entire time. L snatched the mask from Watari and knocked on the bathroom door. "Light? May I come in? I have your mask." There was no hesitation in the door unlocking and L slid through.

L let out a sigh of relief under his breath when his gaze immediately settled on Light, who was sitting on the edge of the bathtub. He looked a lot better, not as pale. He was his usual calculating self again or at least, he appeared to be.

L reached behind himself to lock the door. The two stared silently at each other, keenly aware of the people in the room outside and what they might overhear if they weren't careful.

As the silence stretched and L looked into his lover's eyes, he got the distinct feeling that Light was in no hurry to break the silence. Fine. Then L would do so. "Your mask." He said, holding it out to Light in offering.

Light hesitated before silently taking the mask. He glanced down at it and then looked back up at him. "You don't want to ask?"

He did. He did, so desperately. He wanted to know what was behind Light's downright bizarre reaction to Amane's presence. However, he couldn't get Light's reaction from earlier out of his mind and it didn't feel right to push him. He also couldn't forget their present company, just beyond the bathroom door.

"I have all the answers I need, right now." The words that came out of his mouth surprised even L. What surprised him even more was how truthful it was.

Light looked even more surprised than he felt, all wide golden eyes with various emotions rushing through them. "Later." Light said. The verbiage gave nothing away, but his tone made it sound like a promise. *Later* .

Light put on the mask, tying its ribbon securely around his head. It was a full masquerade mask. It was so cheaply made that L surmised it came from a party store, but it covered his entire face. L decided that if this became a habit, he would have a mask specially made for him.

Once Light was done fastening the mask, he held out his hand again. Light readily took it.

L hoped Light recognized the gesture of support for what it was. He didn't know how to say the right things to connect with someone like Light did. Light never seemed to mind, but all the same, L didn't think he'd be able to say the right words. Not with this. He'd trust Light's ability to read his mind. Light's steps hesitated slightly when they entered the room, but he still allowed L to pull him forward.

L automatically started leading them back to where his chair was, but when Light's hand tightened painfully around his, he decided to aim

for a spot that wasn't right beside Amane, instead. L and Light settled onto twin spots on one of the couches, but Amane immediately hopped over. She threw her arms around L's closest arm like she couldn't help herself.

"Why are you sitting over here now?" She pouted at him. L looked blankly back at her. Amane peered around him to get a better look at Light. "Oh, good! You're finally out of the closet!" Amane beamed at him.

"Bathroom, actually." Matsuda gently corrected her.

Amane went on like he'd never spoken. "They said your name was Light. You're the chief's son, right? I'm Misa Amane. You can call me Misa-Misa, if you like! I'm an actress and model and--" She made a show of squeezing L's arm tighter, making a little sound as she did so. "…Kira's biggest fan!" An expectedly awkward silence descended on the room immediately after her proclamation, dropping down like a brick.

L saw Light's eyes behind his mask narrow in on Amane's grip on his arm. Several members of the group - most notably Matsuda, Misora, Near, and Soichiro - were watching Light watching Amane. Quite as if they were expecting something.

After several more seconds of silence ticked by with Amane growing more obviously unsure of herself, Amane broke the silence. "Maybe you haven't heard of me!" Her voice was cheerful but audibly strained as she stuck her hand out to Light for a handshake. "It's so nice to meet you, though! Even though you spent the last half hour in a closet."

"Bathroom…" Matsuda's voice was quiet.

Light stared at Amane's extended hand, his reluctance evident as the seconds ticked by. Just as L was coming to the conclusion that Light was going to hold out until Amane's hand dropped from exhaustion, Light twitched into stilted movement. Slowly, very slowly, he took her hand and shook it. Then dropped it immediately like it was diseased.

"Who hasn't heard of Misa-Misa?" Matsuda clumsily tried to break the tension. "Anyways, Light, we were just talking about how we're going to go on with the case now that you're back and we have B."

"Well, to be more accurate, we were arguing about whether you should be involved in it or not." Aizawa said, speaking like a man who wasn't entirely happy with the way public opinion was going.

"They told me you were kidnapped!" Misa exclaimed, sounding genuinely concerned which L thought was laughable, because she had taken part in a different kidnapping.

"Many of us felt that you shouldn't jump back into the case so soon after the…incident." Soichiro looked uncomfortable, but he met his son's eyes, steadily. "But some of us were also concerned that you're too involved with the suspect and the case, in general, to be taking part in decision-making. We were coming to the end of that discussion when you joined."

It was L's experience that most of the higher-ups in law enforcement spoke like this about topics they considered difficult. Rather than using the word "argument", he referred to it repeatedly as a discussion and he refrained from pointing out who was on which side of the argument. Not that it was very effective in this case, L decided. Obscuring details like that wouldn't work on someone as intelligent and observant as Light.

"That makes sense." Light said thoughtfully, his voice muffled by the mask. "In any other investigation, this would be a huge conflict of interest, among other things."

"It isn't another investigation, though, and this one already has so many conflicts of interest that it's hardly worth worrying about." Near piped up from the floor.

"And that's the important part that has us stuck." Soichiro sighed, folding his arms. "I trust that you won't do anything rash, but regardless of whatever other concerns we may have, we can't deny that we can't apply traditional metrics to this case."

Even without them knowing what L knew and the differences in their opinions, the team knew the truth of this statement. Light probably overheard fragments of the argument from the bathroom. However, there was so much that couldn't be said with Amane here. He'd explained the ruse they needed to play in front of Amane. He now realized the significance of neglecting to fully inform Light of the situation with the model.

"I don't get why you can't just kill him." Amane turned to him, ignorant of how nearly every detective in the room stiffened at the suggestion.

"Don't forget that my primary identity, the one that the world knows me as, is that of the Detective L." L replied, calmly. "I can't act carelessly and damage that identity."

"Oh, you're right! I wouldn't want to do anything to cause problems for you, Kira!" Amane exclaimed in alarm.

It was relatively easy to manipulate someone this eager, but it didn't

make her presence any less grating.

"Then," Light started, once again staring down Amane. L got the distinct feeling that some of his hostility towards her came from how close she was getting to L himself. "How about we set some basic ground rules about what we can't bend on and not worry about the rest of it?"

~ ⓚ ~

L had never been so relieved to retreat to his room in his life.

…That was likely a lie, but the statement still stood.

Their day had been productive, but his case was a mess, his team rightfully didn't trust him, Amane obnoxiously clung to him like a leech, and Light's obvious disdain for Amane continually kept stress levels high in the room. As if the constant arguments didn't achieve that on their own.

It was late at night by the time he managed to get Amane to leave despite her rather alarming offer to clear her work schedule for the night so that she could help him more. The detective was grateful when Light suggested he and L go back to their room and rest. That was, until the bedroom door closed and L realized he had a new problem.

How did you comfort someone who was upset?

L couldn't recall if he had ever successfully comforted another human being before. Usually, he succeeded only in making people feel worse,

intentionally or otherwise. It occurred to him in that moment just how much he had gotten used to Light breaking the ice for him, both in private and in the larger group. Light's social skills and emotional intelligence made everything so much easier. Things were easier with Light.

L cleared his throat. Only then did Light turn to look at him. "Are you alright, Light?" That felt like the wrong thing to say as soon as he said it. Anyone who had observed Light's reaction earlier could tell he wasn't alright.

"I…" Light let out a weak chuckle. "…don't like Misa Amane."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Are we alone?" Light returned.

L knew what he meant. He shook his head.

"Then all I'll say for now is she freaks me out." Light responded.

L nodded. "That is probably the best for now. We'll have time to have a long conversation once we move to the new headquarters." L was still not entirely happy with Light being in the same place as B, but he would surrender to both Light and Watari's reasoning in this matter.

"About that. I'd like to ask for a few things." Light sat on one of the beds and patted the spot beside him.

L padded over and crouched on the bed next to him. "What is it?" L asked, curiously.

Here, a smile broke through on Light's face, the first since Amane had arrived. "Are we going to share a room there, too? I ask because I'd like that."

L felt a rush of…something…at those words. "I see no reason why not." That wasn't entirely true, but while their shared sleeping arrangements started as a way to prove his innocence, his name had ostensibly been cleared and no one had broached the topic of him and Light no longer cohabitating, which L was not above taking advantage of. "You said there were multiple things you wanted to ask for?" L prompted.

"Can you take the cameras and listening devices out of the room we'll be staying in?" Light asked.

L's instinctive urge was to be worried about what might go on in the room that he would miss, but he reminded himself that he didn't need to sneak around anymore and neither did Light. Things were out in the open between them now, so those devices served no purpose anymore. They were only a hindrance.

"I'll make sure they're removed before you set foot in it." L promised.

Light's resulting smile was brilliant and it made L's chest swell with warmth. L would admit to some excitement to not have to watch his words with Light. Even though they were attempting to be honest with each other now, they still had to watch what they said around others and be mindful of the cameras.

The idea felt freeing.

~ Ⓚ ~

Near has been called antisocial. He was told that he was introverted.

Near didn't talk a lot, he didn't see the point. It was easier to play games than talk to people and he preferred it that way. But…just because he didn't talk as much as Mello did, it didn't mean he didn't notice things. Near liked sitting and watching. Since joining the investigation, he'd taken to watching Light, in particular. Although the three of them had been explicitly brought onto this case to help clear L when his name came under question, it hadn't been Near's priority. He didn't look up to L the same way Mello did. He didn't care if it was L, he would find the guilty party in this game.

It was just that Light proved very interesting to watch. He was a person made up of contradictions. He maintained internal consistency while making no sense, objectively.

Near has known that Light was Kira for ages now. He hadn't been told much about the state of the Kira Case before arriving, but Light was very clearly the main suspect.

Near watched as Light deftly manipulated the room. He watched as Light complimented the people around him and pumped them up. How Light would soften his voice when someone was agitated, immediately calming them back down. How he'd immediately position himself next to L, Naomi, or the police chief and look over their shoulders. How he'd whisper and giggle with Matsuda.

When Light would openly back away from being part of certain decisions because he was a suspect, while simultaneously directing the case in ways that were less obvious. Light would give a good show of

analyzing all available data about the case, but actually did *nothing* to push the case forward or uncover anything of substance. How his words didn't match his actions except on a surface level.

Near watched all of it.

It was clear Light was Kira. He wasn't acting like a real investigator who actually wanted to solve this case, but he also fit the profile of Kira. L posited that Kira was young and idealistic early on in the investigation. Light fit the first criteria, at least. For Near's part, he read Kira as someone driven by a strong moral code and a desire to enact change.

In other words, Kira was someone who couldn't mind their own business.

They seemed hypocritical in some ways, attempting to keep the criminal population in check by becoming part of it, for example. In other ways, though, they felt jaded. They didn't have any discernible faith in humanity and their habit of killing people pointed to a generally low regard for human life, which was at odds with Kira's apparent purpose behind their crimes.

Light embodied every one of these contradictions and then some. Near had pretty much clocked Light as Kira the moment he saw him, if for no other reason than because of how unbothered and unhurried by almost everything in the investigation. But he didn't give voice to the suspicion. He had seen how that worked out for L and he wasn't nearly as impulsive as Mello was, so he did what he did best. He remained quiet and observed. And in that way, he learned a lot about Kira, adding more to his profile, bit-by-bit.

Murderer, criminal, hypocrite, busybody, opinionated…kind… affectionate…open minded…oddly honest…supportive…protective…

dedicated…strong morals.

Light was a walking contradiction.

One moment, you thought you'd discovered everything about him and the next, he reveals a new part of himself. He manipulated, he acted, and he lied. Then he turned around and told the truth, painfully, overwhelmingly so. He was a person with no masks and endless faces.

Near clutched the jacket and toy Light gave him closer to his chest. No one had ever hugged him the way Light did. He'd never had someone buy him gifts without a reason, never gotten things that weren't directly meant to improve his training. When Mello had confronted him yesterday, he spoke honestly. He didn't care about how the case ended up. He'd always decided what was right and wrong for himself without relying on others to decide those things for him. Before starting the case, he thought Kira was crazy, but now…

Today, someone had unsettled Light, really unsettled him, and Near found himself hating to see him like that. Warm, welcoming Light who gave him hugs and smiled like it was the easiest thing in the world, had turned pale and looked like he'd just seen a ghost. Light should never look like that.

Near didn't like it at all.

~ ❶ ~

Wammy had been hailed as a genius in his own right in his youth.

He was a genius inventor, creating a variety of goods and products that were in wide use now, revolutionizing his field. But as he grew older, he came to a realization and from that spawned many other realizations. It wouldn't be that much longer before he left this world and he had still only accomplished little of what his capabilities rendered him capable of. Perhaps that was because Watari had only found his focus, his creative drive later in life, when he was in his twenties.

He recalled children in his hometown who were trained to work in their family's businesses at a young age. The butcher's son took many days off of school for the reason that he was needed in his father's shop that day but when he was young, still just Quillsh Wammy, he'd once stopped by to see the boy work and he had greater skill at ten than Wammy would ever see in most adults. If Wammy had started earlier, he'd have achieved so much more. Yes, training early was always the answer.

Children were like dolls.

Marionettes.

A word, an action, could bend them this way, make them move that way. They were perfect for molding. They could be shaped to serve a purpose. Of course, you had to choose the right material. You can't make something from nothing, after all. It was too late for Wammy to fix that about himself, but the realization wasn't useless. It convinced him of what his final great achievement should be.

That's why he first opened his orphanage, he'd eventually realized that the old saying was true: children are the future. No matter how many inventions he created, they would never shape the world as much as creating intelligent children to go out into the world and create more. So he started an orphanage for gifted children and pulled them in from other orphanages all over the world. The children had to pass a testing process prepared by himself and then they would be admitted

to the facility, which functioned more like a specialized school. The exercises they went through would sharpen and harden them like steel blades, turning their innate potential into something stronger.

At that time, he was playing the numbers game. Not all of those children would amount to anything of substance. In fact, many of them would not. However, if the orphanage turned out enough successful children of genius-level intelligence, he would consider that gratifying. Their successes would be his own.

That was before L came into his life.

That child was something special, he'd known it from the moment he saw him in that park. By that point, he'd spent a great deal of time around highly intelligent children, enough to know that despite being smart, they were all still children. They all came to the orphanage acting like children and they would need to be trained not to act emotionally and to be more deliberate in all things. When he'd approached the lone child in that park that evening, he'd quickly ascertained that the child had been abandoned.

The child was intelligent enough to realize that, as well. And yet, he stated that he didn't think his parents were coming back in only the most calm, analytical tone. Cold as the Winter air around them. It reminded Wammy slightly of his own. Any other child L's age would be panicked and sobbing uncontrollably. Wammy took the boy back to the orphanage that night without bothering to file a police report on the parents. It was more convenient for all parties if the child disappeared without a trace, so he could properly start anew. Likewise, he didn't bother with testing L; it wasn't necessary.

There was a learning curve, most definitely. After bringing the child back and seeing him beat up the other children, he learned L needed to be kept separate. Like the other children, L grew bored when he didn't have something stimulating to work on, but unlike those kids, L worked through problems at a rapid pace. It was difficult to keep him

entertained and eventually Wammy got him a computer system so that he would have an endless well of projects to work on.

Even he hadn't anticipated how much L would be able to achieve with that alone. No other child had gone past their workload and taken to solving cases to satiate themselves and the level of success L found doing so was unprecedented. In the end, Wammy decided to devote the rest of his short life to this genius child. L completely rerouted his goals with the orphanage. Now that Wammy knew it was possible for a child to naturally exist at this level, he wanted to create another one.

He switched from quantity to quality and the training intensified. But L remained his one true success. He traveled around the world to follow L throughout his cases. He did everything for L. And this was how it was turning out? Because of one insignificant boy, a criminal? L had committed the crucial mistake that no investigator ever should: he fell in love with a suspect. He'd been doing so well up until this point, too.

He'd never gotten emotionally invested in a case or made personal connections anywhere. It contributed greatly to his success as an investigator. But L was a young man and despite his long resume, still inexperienced. Light Yagami might be calling him like a siren now, but Wammy knew that L could still move on and eventually those memories would fade. Watari himself had many dalliances as a young man.

Those relationships had meant more than the world at the time, showing him great joy and great pain, but now as an old man, he found they'd all faded into near nothingness in his memory. In the end, those experiences, while pleasant, had accomplished nothing of value. Watari had come close, but thankfully never sacrificed his career. Now L was getting dangerously close to making that mistake.

This was shaping up to be a blemish on his career that no one would

ever let him forget, one that would follow him his whole life. Kira was not some small-time criminal. Kira was THE criminal. The world was watching. L was risking his very career and everything they've both worked for, and for what? Some ill-advised love affair that would amount to little more than memories in the end.

L wasn't thinking clearly. Watari had tried to make him see sense and L had failed to follow through. Now he had no choice but to pull the trigger for him. Rougher measures would have to be taken. Thankfully, L had agreed to his suggestion that they move to the new building L had built. That would make it easier.

L would see reason with time. Time away from Light. Space from that boy would make the feelings he was experiencing fade and fade and fade. Watari would give him other cases to focus on after this and he would recover. This was nothing but a blip that L would forget about.

~ ❶ ~

A day and a half later found them moving into the new building. Since Light had (un)officially moved in with L, they went together and his dad, feeling guilty for how long he'd gone without visiting their family, would join them the next morning with the others. Meanwhile, Light; L; the boys; and Watari went through multiple trips to move into the building that night. Which brought Light here. He was standing in the room L said was theirs. Tomorrow morning, the others would join them here, including…

Light cringed at the reminder of his episode the other day. Maybe this was all one big miscalculation on his part. He felt guilty for how he'd treated her back then, he didn't want to kill her and he probably should've left her alone. Let her die her predetermined human death. But then, he was in the Human World to save humans from dying unfair deaths, wasn't he? At least some of them. Letting her be killed out of spite made him feel childish and bitter and…and he'd felt like

crap. No matter what she'd done to him, he hadn't treated her any better. Her life had been used as a bargaining chip and after going back in time…

…well, he felt like, with the way he'd disregarded her life in his first one, if he turned around and did it here…it made him feel like he hadn't changed. Like he was still that person who really only cared about himself and discarded lives whenever it suited him. He had spent so long trying to distance himself from the person he used to be.

He wanted to have changed, to have moved past being that person.

The whole point of convincing Misa that L was Kira was to bug him because she would no doubt try to insert herself into the investigation and Light could direct her attention away from himself. He'd considered that she would try to cling to L, but he didn't think she'd actually swing it, since she wasn't a suspect as the Second Kira anymore. L certainly showed no interest in wanting to be close to her. He would've thought, at least, that he'd have some warning to get himself ready.

Still, the violence of his reaction at seeing her again surprised even him. Seeing her, all of those unpleasant memories and feelings exploded inside him. She was a living reminder of the hardest time of his life, a time marked by guilt and hatred and loss. And he had the sudden urge to *leave* . Once he'd calmed down, he'd only felt safe leaving the bathroom with a mask covering his face. He remembered her and Rem saying that her stalker crush on him was separate from him being Kira and see seemingly fell at first sight, so his safe space became the mask.

That was how he survived the last few days, but it wouldn't last. He needed to get ahold of himself and his past.

L had left to attend to the last remaining parts of the move, leaving him alone for the moment. Light ran his fingers aimlessly along a nightstand as he thought. This was the same room they'd stayed in in his first life, he knew it well. He *had* wondered. He'd wondered if L would choose the same room. He wasn't sure what he felt about it.

The only difference was that instead of one big bed, the room had two smaller ones. Not too small, however, for two people to sleep in one together if they were close. Light felt a smile tug at his lips, reading L's thoughts clearly from the evidence presented to him. L wanted to share a bed with him, but remembered his dad's rule about not sharing a bed and didn't want to get caught out for it. You've got to love that plausible deniability.

The slight difference in this room from the one in his memories was comforting. *Right. Enough wasting time,* Light thought. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper he'd pre-written in his and Ryuk's code, holding it out so the Shinigami peered over his shoulder could read it. It read: *Check if there are any cameras or listening devices in this room.*

"On it!" Ryuk said, immediately starting to crawl along the ceiling.

Light returned the note to his pocket so he could destroy it later, just as a precaution. It wasn't that he didn't believe what L told him about having them all removed. It was just that cautiousness was in his nature at this point and he couldn't just let his guard down. He would prefer to verify it for himself.

Light reclined on the bed and closed his eyes, feeling the late hour catch up to him as he waited for his friend's findings. It was probably only a few minutes later that he felt some small items fall onto his chest. He knew what he was going to see when he opened his eyes, but that didn't stop disappointment from settling in his gut when he saw three small devices that might have been cameras or might just pick up audio.

Light picked up one of the devices on his stomach deceptively gently and took a good look at it. Then he scooped them all up in his hand and held them out to Ryuk, locking eyes with him. *Do it.*

The other Shinigami's face split into a toothy grin and he reached a clawed hand out, swiping the bugs up and crushing them in his strong grip in the next second.

"Jeez, what does it take to get some rest here?" Light asked aloud. Now that the bugs were destroyed, he could relax a bit. "Is that all of them?" He asked, though he had absolutely no doubt that Ryuk got them all.

"Yep! There isn't a single one left!" Ryuk crowed from where he was floating above Light. Light's lips quirked upwards in a smile at his friend before the look drooped as he stared at the crushed tech in his claw.

"You want me to trash the evidence?" Ryuk asked, familiar with Light's methods by now.

"No." Light said, lost in thought. "For now, I want to keep it." One question concerned him at the moment and it was playing over-and-over in his mind.

Did L know those were here?

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